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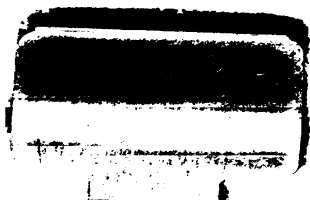
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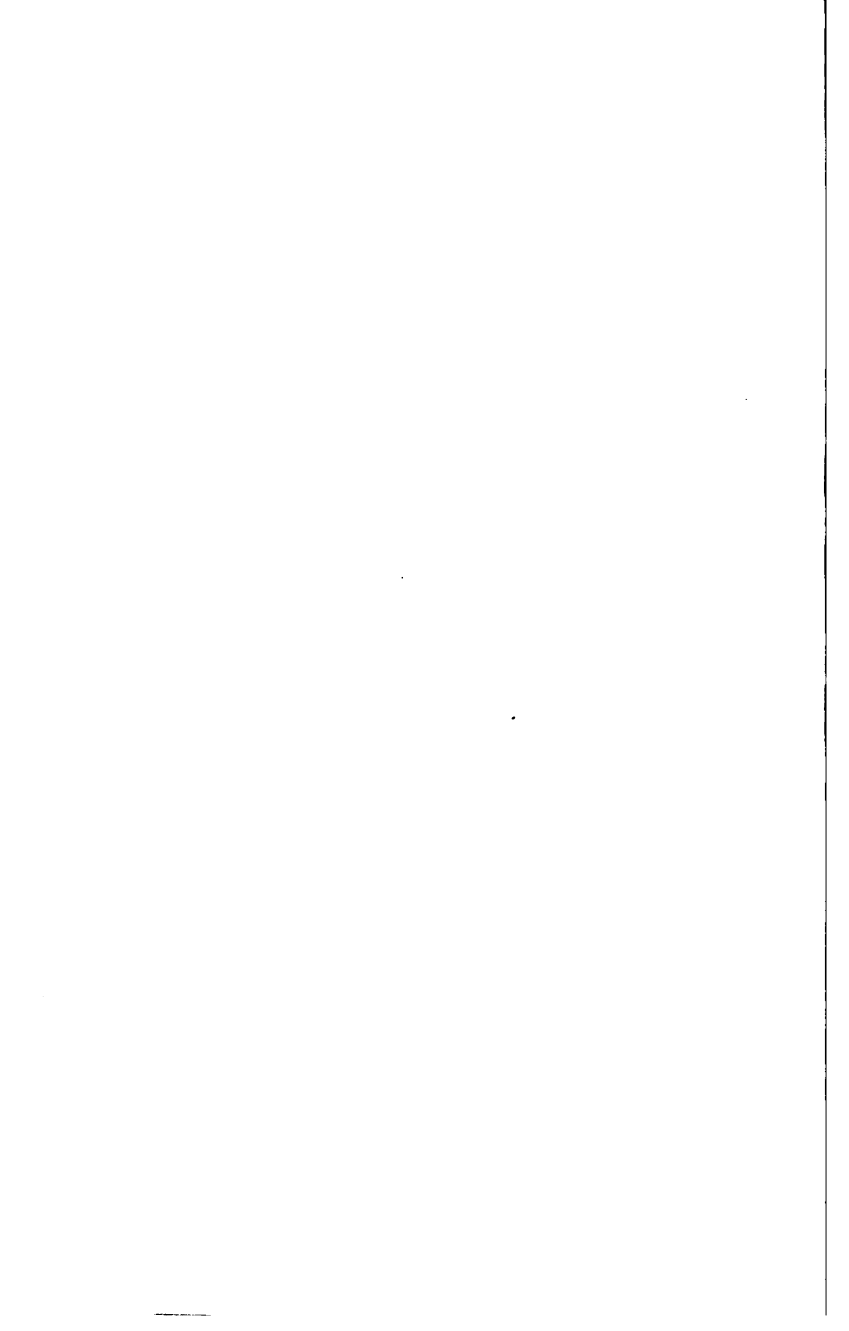
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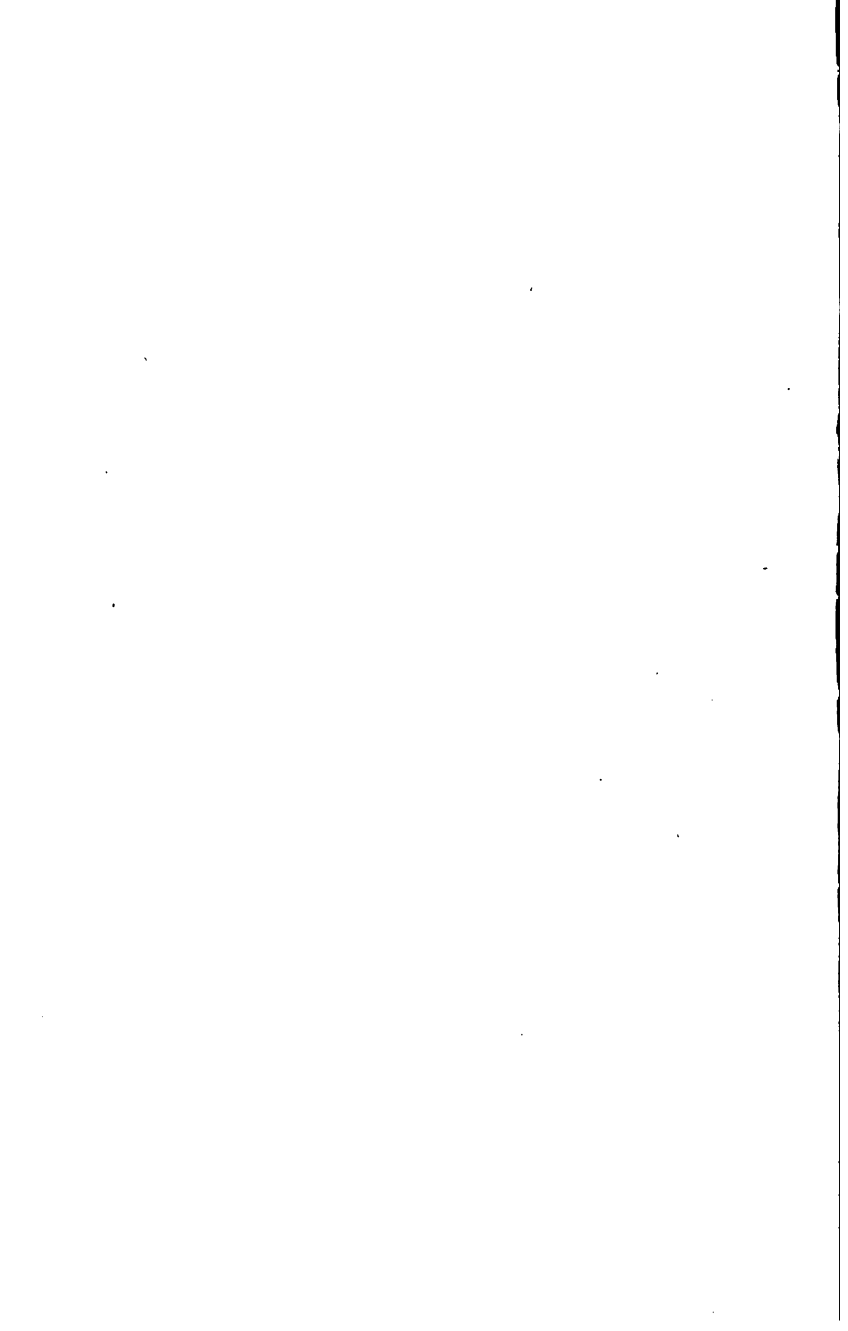
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THE RED LANTERN



THE RED LANTERN : BY EDITH WHERRY :

"OH, EAST IS EAST AND WEST IS WEST
AND NEVER THE TWAIN SHALL MEET."

THE
RED LANTERN

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TO MY FRIEND
THEODORA POLLOK

AUTHOR'S NOTE

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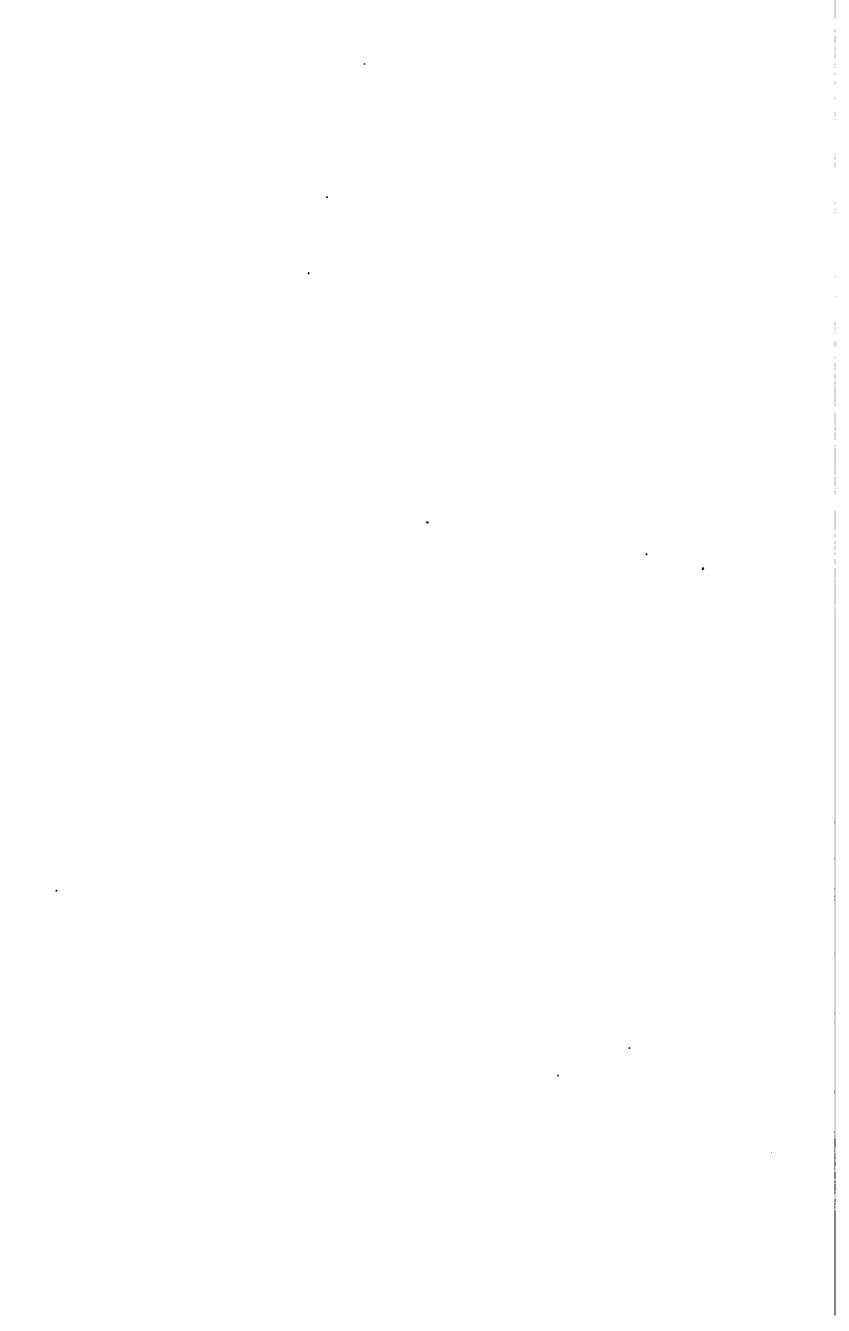
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PROEM
MY TWIN LILY BUDS





MY TWIN LILY BUDS

IN that fantastic and incomprehensible old capital, Peking, there was, before the late Boxer uprising, perhaps no region more suggestive of lurking ills, of gloom, treachery, and ignominy, where fate skulks in sickly guise, than that lying beyond the Eastern Market Place under the shadow of the lofty Tartar Wall which divides the Manchu from the Chinese city. In this place of owls and bats and ruined tree-tops from which the moss hung like the beards of hoary demons, even the children seemed aged and misshapen, while their parents sitting apathetically in sunken doorways looked like mummies partially revived.

On one of the streets in this quarter that seemed more palsied with age if possible than the others, so crooked and uncertain were its meanderings, so feeble its current of life, a coffin shop stood out between a coalyard and joss house, like an impish leer at the death-in-life about it. And in the scene that was being enacted in the courtyard behind it, irony completed itself. For a woman like an ancient chronicle in wax, seared, blackened, almost mildewed by time, came blinking out from one of the chambers of the quadrangle, supported by a burly fellow who led her gallantly enough towards a newly-made coffin.

"Hai! There, now, mother! What do you say to that? Five feet of good timber in the lid alone, joints not to be cracked open by a mallet, and all ready if you die to-night."

THE RED LANTERN

The kindness of the tone was unmistakable. The old dame shrank neither from the speaker, nor the object of his pride. Instead, she hobbled closer to the coffin and helped her old eyes by running her hands over the sides and edges of it.

"Honey-comb joints," she muttered, "and nails all ready to be driven. I'll sleep well of the worms! Aye, it is a good son, a good son!" Her delight was sincere if grisly. Then a fear possessed her and her old tones cracked in voicing it.

"Is my son sure of the fit?"

The burly fellow burst into a guffaw of laughter.

"Mahlee," he cried to a girl of about sixteen who was seated in a doorway. "Our mother, here, is afraid of cramped knees in her new bed. Fetch a quilt and spread it within. We'll see that her legs have room."

The girl laughed, then shivered. As she arose, she appeared extraordinarily tall for a Chinese woman, and she was possessed of a baffling beauty. Yet, certainly the formula of loveliness prevailing from time immemorial in the Flowery Kingdom did not fit her in every item. "Eyebrows like the leaf of the willow, eyes like the kernel of an apricot, a mouth like a cherry, a face shaped like a melon seed," were phrases too regular to describe that which made her at once a charm and a puzzle. Yet one last simile—"a waist like a poplar and the willow in the wind"—poetic justice might have granted her, for from the waves of her black hair to the arch of her foot she was all lissomeness and undulation.

At the moment, only she of the three persons in the courtyard felt any grimness in the "fitting" of the coffin; only she felt its sardonic humour. And this discernment in her was of a piece with the ripple in her hair, the English stubbornness of her chin, and the blue in the iris of her eye, although for the most part she held her eyes half closed like a Buddha's. When she did that, the lids appeared quite plainly almond-shaped. It was

only the flash of humour or anger or joy that revealed the Saxon blue in them. Child of Europe and Asia, and scornfully disowned by both, Mahlee was without pride of surname.

Still smiling and shivering, the Eurasian girl brought the quilt and laid it in double folds in the coffin. The old woman held up her arms and was lifted into it by her son. He straightened out her limbs with rough tenderness.

"See you, the fit is faultless."

"Aye, there is ample room," the old waxen head fell back contentedly on the quilt, the eyelids relaxed, the appearance of death was complete.

The laugh and shiver of the girl mingled in a nervous scream. She fell on her knees by the coffin, clasping long gold-coloured hands in supplication.

"Granddame, quick! open your eyes!"

Yang-Ling, the coffinmaker, laughed loudly, and his old mother shuffled to a sitting position, giving out a gat-toothed grumble.

"Girl, will you always be a cat treading on my heart? Do you not know the proverb, When the tops of the ears of an old person hang down and are dry he must be destined soon to enter his coffin! It is seemly, then, that all things be prepared." She turned with grateful gentleness to Yang-Ling. "I have a dutiful son. May the gods reward him!" And for a moment her old cheek rubbed against his hand as she was lifted out and set on her feet.

Mahlee hung her head. She could understand that her grandmother's seemingly commonplace submission in the face of death was, in truth, the mark of a culture consummated through the ages of an ancient nation—that admirable poise, not stiff with stoicism, but full of naturalness which is the death right of the Oriental. In such a view of it the girl's fastidious taste could not but approve of Madame Ling's quiescence, and feel

it in her own nature to love, had upon the death of her mother—poor speechless victim!—fastened convulsively upon the next nearest object, which happened to be the withered stem supporting that old yellow quince—her grandmother's head! The gods must have smiled to see them there—the beldame writhing superstitiously in the embrace of an infant demi-she-devil, yet with a certain dim hankering to cuddle the thing, and the little demon herself not to be put off with less than a trial tug at each of the old woman's dried bags of breasts; and finally the gat-toothed grin at the exploit simultaneous with the shrill wail of defeat.

No, Madame Ling did not hate her granddaughter. When Mahlee, to please her on fête days, braided her hair in comely fashion, plastering all the unmaidenly tendrils flat to her head with quince seed paste, and remembering to keep her eyelids lowered so that the blue beneath did not show, had issued forth to market or shops with the conventional mincing step of the Chinese damsel, Madame Ling had even been proud to lean on the arm of the handsome girl, and introduce her to friends as her "stupid thorn."

The mincing step had been acquired after long practice to mitigate one horror of foreignness about the girl, otherwise irremediable; Mahlee's feet were a good span in length—truly a scandal in a country where five inches of feminine extremity is thought vulgar, four inches only lady-like, and three not too dainty. To call Mahlee's feet "Lotus Flowers" was considered by the neighbourhood exquisite irony, and a sonnet addressed to them by some wag as "My Twin Lily Buds," beginning:

*"Big feet, good luck; we all suppose
Felicity hangs from the tips of the toes,"*

was regarded as an achievement in satire.

Most of the young women of Mahlee's age had plucked

out their front locks for the bridal, and some were even now mothers. They believed that Mahlee's feet formed her sole obstacle to like distinction, and commiserated her openly. One little lady, by name Mrs. Chao, who herself minced through the world like a butterfly on needle-points, jestingly advised the girl to cut off the offending members, for even stumps, she supposed, would be more comely than such barbarities. But Mehlee received both jests and satire for what they were worth, sincerely regretting that her feet had never been bound, but making the best of the matter by cultivating a dainty hobble on the tips of her toes.

But as for Madame Ling, she found on approaching death that she could support with some equanimity the thought of Mahlee's blue eyes and curling hair—the gods might overlook them as freaks of nature. But those unbroken feet became a burden well-nigh insupportable. They could look nothing less than monstrous to any god of refined sensibilities; already she heard the voice of doom pronouncing sentence upon her: "A swine thou shalt be! Nirvana is not for those who have given their blood to the making of feet so abominable!"

Long ago she would have bound Mahlee's feet before they had grown to such enormities but for the command laid upon her by the "foreign mandarin," Mahlee's father. After giving orders for the mother's burial, he had glanced at the babe and learning that it was a girl, "You shall not bind her feet," he had said, and strode off, never again to reappear. That, with some 600 taels—a fortune!—left carelessly on a table, was the only provision he had made for his daughter. But Madame Ling, to whom the command had been addressed, feared devils as well as gods; and although the words themselves would have restrained her but little, she remembered the blue glint of the foreigner's eyes which emphasised them, and dared not disobey.

Madame Ling thought of these things as she sat bolstered up among her pillows deftly chasing *jou-po-pos* about her bowl with her polished chopsticks. The late afternoon sunshine filtered in through the papered lattice of the room as a milky translucence through which familiar objects lost their distinctness like pale stars in a nebula. In truth it was the fitting medium for the play of the old woman's waning senses, as if she were permitted to linger a moment in some delicate mid-world before the blotting of complete darkness.

Her voice, when she finally broke silence, reached the Eurasian girl seated by the door, less as a human utterance than as an impalpable hand stretched from some remote obscurity. The girl felt rather than heard it, and quivered under its searching lightness.

"The gods demand sacrifice, Mahlee."

"Aye, Granddame, I have heard it said."

"Did you notice a savour of death in me as I lay in the coffin?"

"It was rather the appearance of a deep sleep."

"But sleep is not fearful. Come, tell me why you screamed." The old woman's beady eyes glittered in the paleness.

"The honourable closing of your lids"—here Mahlee stopped.

"You have seen them close before."

"Aye, I have seen them close before."

"Then why did you cry out as if you had seen a spirit?"

For answer the overwrought girl rose from her bench and flung herself on the *kang* at her grandmother's feet.

"Oh, Granddame, Granddame! I shall be desolate without you!"

There was a singular gleam in the little black eyes which was not altogether the light of answering affection. Nevertheless, she placed a mildewed hand on the girl's shoulders.

"It is true," she said, "that the owl never comes on an errand of good omen and yesternight I saw him perched on a pile of coffins outside my window."

Mahlee sobbed.

"On the 5th, the 14th and the 23rd days of the month," Madame Ling continued, "one has said, 'Do not venture to risk the Pill of Immortality.' I have regarded this word, and passed by those days, but now in the waning of the moon, it would be safe to go out if all were accomplished."

"Is not the coffin made?" Mahlee wondered.

"Aye, and a handsome one it is, but the gods are jealous and demand other things besides."

"What other things, Granddame?"

But the old woman had sunk into a reverie, and a half hour passed before she spoke again. Mahlee took some live charcoals from a brazier with a pair of tongs and put them into the fire-place which was built into the *kang*. Flues ran from it under the brick. The November nights were chill: Madame Ling had always liked a warm bed; now more than ever it was a necessity to her bloodless limbs. After blowing up the fire, as the day was already darkening, Mahlee lighted a wick afloat in oil and prepared by its feeble rays a sedative of white wine and opium which she held to her grandmother's lips. The flickering light from the wick brought out the contours and shapes in the little room with tremulous uncertainty. The earthen irregular floor, the sunken doorway barely holding the door by its broken hinges, the unceiled rafters blackened by the smoke of generations of coffinmakers, the walls with the tattered plaster adhering to the grey brick like the scales of a scrofula, and finally, the wizened body of the old woman wrapped in its quilts on the *kang*, were the large hieroglyphs of the immemorial poverty of China, that inertia of ages, which has settled down over millions like the blighting dust of the street.

Yet even into this wretched dwelling the national art had penetrated. Madame Ling, also, as well as any grand *tai-tai* (lady) of the land possessed her carved teak-wood chest in which were kept precious bits of cloisonné, porcelains, and lacquer, and among them two bowls of translucent jade chiselled in an extravagance of *finesse* with fairy workmanship of flower and leaf, butterfly and bird, and elegant little monster. The very cup, indeed, that Mahlee now held to her grandmother's lips was a miracle of old China, and the face that leaned over it from out the quilts was no less a one. For it would be scant justice to regard Madame Ling with her superstitions as a mere vulgar crone, when a very prince of a connoisseur might well have been baffled to interpret the records of that waxen countenance. For the paradoxes of the Chinese character were written therein, which of all paradoxes in the world are the least understood. If the oblique old eyes held abysses of superstition, of avarice and deceit, they were just as truly clear wells of fortitude,—endurance infinitely good-humoured of every ill the gods might send. And the almost toothless mouth remained, even in the pitiable sinking inward of the withered lips, a mark of the fine self-sufficiency of her race, which was scarcely weakened by any servility the body could betray. The trembling limbs and quavering voice might beg for a certain leniency, but Madame Ling herself was free from the craving for sympathy, although she took it when offered as she might have accepted a honey-cake. Nevertheless, as was soon wonderfully to be revealed, this strange old hag had also her passions. She could despise with passion and love with passion, and could display both these feelings in turn towards the same object with a sort of appalling completeness. But for no human being—unless it were the “foreign mandarin”—had Madame Ling ever known either fear or reverence, although for the gods and all inhabitants of the

supernatural world she had a profound and abiding awe.

This fear was in her eyes, now, as she sipped the poppied wine. For, in truth, with her reflections on the past, there had been forming in Madame Ling's mind a scruple. She had never known what had become of Mahlee's father. What if the foreigner were already dead? Would she not have to meet him soon on the further brink and render to him an account of those 600 taels he had left as his daughter's patrimony? Could she tell him that she had spent it all for jade and porcelain to fill her teak-wood chest? This was not, to be sure, her gravest cause for alarm—not comparable indeed to the danger she ran with the gods on account of Mahlee's feet; but yet she felt that the foreign mandarin, in any incorporeal state he might have assumed since his hasty leave-taking so many years ago, could hardly fail to be a powerful sort of demon and in his degree would also need propitiating. So it was that Madame Ling for the first time in her life addressed Mahlee with the formality which she had always insisted the girl should use towards herself:

"May it be your honourable pleasure to fetch me our chest."

The proud flush in Mahlee's cheeks was the prelude to her humble response:

"My unworthy hands are ever happy in your service!"

She lifted the chest to the *kang* and opened its carved doors. The flickering light in the room played about the polished surface of the china and the cloisonné, and crept into the tiny chiselled crevices of the two jade bowls. These last the girl placed in Madame Ling's hands, as she had done every night since she was old enough to be entrusted with the service. The old lady gloated over them now with the same fervour as on the day she had purchased them with the taels of little Mahlee's patrimony. They were the finest things in

her collection, and her collection was the finest in the neighbourhood. She had never begrudged the price she had paid for them, although Yang-Ling at the time had grumbled at her for not using the money to repair the dilapidated walls and leaking roof of the house. But her answer had silenced him. She would like to know if her much-to-be-censured offspring could not live where his worshipful ancestors had dwelt before him, without wasting a whole patrimony (she did not say whose!) on effeminate repairs. If his eyes had not been glued entirely shut, he would have perceived indeed that the fame of their illustrious household did not rest on gross brick and mortar but on the fine metals of adornment and delight.

Whatever may be said for the logic of this volley, it is to be questioned if a sound roof over her head and firm walls about her would have given Madame Ling half the comfort that the contemplation of the fragile jade had brought her every night for sixteen years. It had been understood that the bowls were to be buried with her. Night after night, Mahlee had renewed her promise to fulfil this duty. The gods, whom Madame Ling habitually regarded as connoisseurs in art, would no doubt recognise the distinction of any one who could bring them such offerings.

But, to-night, Madame Ling's gloating look was intensified by another look of almost agonised regret at the suddenly formed decision to part from her treasures. For in truth her old nerves shrank from any more "dominant influences flying into space" which she might encounter on the other side of the grave. So it was with a pang, sharp but brief, that she handed the bowls back to her granddaughter.

"They are honourably yours," she said, with just a touch of plaintiveness in her old voice, "purchased with the taels the foreign mandarin, your father, left for your dowry."

She gave no apology or reason for her original appropriation of the money. Mahlee, amazed, curtsied low. Her cheeks glowed with a curious metallic lustre as if a layer of gold-leaf had been applied under the skin. But her reply was meek :

"The exceedingly estimable gift which my most honourable grandmother has lavished upon me, I permit myself unworthily to accept."

Madame Ling drew a profound sigh. She had hoped at the last instant that Mahlee would refuse the gift, and that the bowls might be buried with her according to her most cherished dream. Indeed the sigh smote the girl's heart.

"Granddame, Granddame," she sobbed, "I don't want the brittle green things ! "

Madame Ling's old Chinese eyes snapped with momentary anger at the disparagement ; then they began to twinkle with amazing cunning as she put her hand on the shaking shoulder of her granddaughter.

"Aye, aye, they are only brittle baked clay, as you say, and not worth your taking. Your granddame has been a great fool to cherish them so long, but bury them in my coffin, like a good girl, and do not tell the neighbours what an old hedgehog of an ancestor you had."

She began to chuckle with such violence that Mahlee feared she had taken a fit, and compelled her to swallow more of the wine and opium. It had its effect. The old woman fell back on her pillows but her eyes remained open. She had another, more momentous propitiation to make before she could die in peace !

The heavy fumes of the sedative made Mahlee drowsy. She sat down on a bench and lolled back with her head against the wall, her long arms dropped straight downward at her sides with the heaviness of inanimate things. She felt as if she were gradually turning into a mummy from mere contact with so

much that was old and withered. Madame Ling's form was visible to her now only as a pitiful outline sunken between its quilts. But the lighted wick cast a weird reflection upon the old woman's head so that it became a pivot for the girl's dreamy consciousness. The intense beady glitter from the watchful old orbs acted, indeed, upon her nerves like a hypnotic charm, and as she breathed more and more the room's surcharged atmosphere, she felt her own eyelids closing heavily. Yet underneath them she retained for some time a vision of the old head swaying forward over the quilts. She must finally, however, have fallen asleep in the gloom and silence and inebriating smoke of the miserable room.

Then, suddenly, she started to hear the silence broken by the same words that Madame Ling had uttered in the beginning of the evening :

"The gods demand sacrifice, Mahlee."

"What sacrifice do they demand, Granddame?"

"Do you remember Mrs. Chao, Mahlee?"

The question seemed irrelevant.

"Mrs. Chao—the *tai-tai* (lady) who presented you with ten pounds of tea lately?"

"The same. Do you recall her advice?"

"That I should cut off my feet and walk on my knees? Aye, it was a good jest," Mahlee laughed.

Madame Ling sighed profoundly for the second time that night. Mahlee slept anew with the sigh in her ears until perfect stillness came and held her completely unconscious. Then after some unreckonable period, whether a half hour, an hour, or three hours, she could never say, the girl found herself again fully and—terribly—awake!

The waning moon, just ready to slink below the horizon like a scarlet thing of shame, flung its last rays lurid and defiant into the hovel as Mahlee heard Madame Ling's voice say in clear vivid enunciation :

"The advice was well given, my Granddaughter. It is my desire too. The gods will richly reward you for so filial an act and I shall die in peace." The words she had so long pondered were out at last and the old women fell back exhausted on her cushions.

Mahlee started up erect on her bench and gazed at her grandmother. Then she arose and advanced mechanically towards the *kang*. But a profound change was coming over the Eurasian's face. Her heavy oval lids slowly lifted until, not only the blue irides, but the whites of the eyes also, were baldly uncovered in the moonlight; then, as slowly, they closed until the heavy black lashes fell over the cheeks from which every drop of blood had receded. Three times they thus lifted and fell, while the girl remained like a statue cut in old ivory.

In truth, the words which Madame Ling had just uttered were turning to monsters of meaning in Mahlee's brain. For the expression of desire by one in authority is for the Chinese girl the equivalent of a command, and a command bears an absolutely fixed relation to the act of obedience. Now a horrible intelligence was dawning in Mahlee of what was being asked of her. She knew of the command laid upon Madame Ling by her foreign father that his child's feet should not be bound, and she knew that these unbroken extremities of hers were objects of superstitious remorse to her grandmother. *Now she was commanded to cut them off!*

The girl suddenly sank to the ground and stretched before her those poor, despised, but life-long allies, her feet—so suddenly threatened with destruction. She picked them up as if they were helpless twin babies, stripped them bare, and leaned her face over them, scanning them in a curious sort of pity of their inelegant soundness. Then, rising, she took up the cup of the sedative which had been left on a table, weighed

it a moment in her hand, smelled it, and turned her face again to Madame Ling.

Her brow grew clammy. She pressed her hand heavily over her eyes. A curious vision haunted her. It was a wan little shadow flitting up and down, down and up the long River of Souls. She saw it stop and beg each ghost that it passed to help it over the river to the gate of Paradise beyond. She saw the phantoms gaze pityingly upon it, and then impotently shake their heads. And after each refusal she heard a sound which tore her heart. It was a patient plaint of weariness from the wan little shadow. Her mother's soul, lost on the banks of eternity! In life she had been sold to a demon, and for that monstrous wrong she must in death wander for ever outside the gates of Paradise.

Suddenly a frightful thought engulfed Mahlee. In her quality as her father's child was she not a half-devil and as such had she not the power of the evil to damn and torture souls?

A thrill ran through her. The change from stupefaction to determination was wonderfully swift. She shook off her old humility like a rag from her shoulders and began to move about like a grand lady before her inferior. Even in the gloom the blue showed horribly in her excited eyes. She tossed her head back and the masses of her sombre hair loosened and fell into a hundred quivering coils of wrath.

A soul for soul! She would avenge that ancient wrong by wreaking penalty upon whom it belonged! Hordes of strange malicious spirits seemed suddenly to take form out of the sick moonlight and compass her about. She stretched out her young arms to them. "The gods have mocked me!" she cried. "I am yours now. Help me!"

As if in response to her appeal, she felt herself filled with a passionate evil energy. The floor seemed to move under her like a nest of serpents bringing her

without effort to the teak-wood chest. Opening its doors, she took out a small vial. This she weighed and smelled as she had done the cup; then deliberately, she emptied its entire contents into the latter frail receptacle. The fumes of opium became denser as the willowy figure of the girl moved with swift grace to the *kang*, while Madame Ling sank lower into her pillows and began to whimper. Even the Avenger by the River of Souls could scarce be as terrible as this tall angry girl.

Madame Ling began to wave her hands weakly and cry: "Fie! shoo! shoo!" as if chasing off a nightmare, when suddenly Mahlee gripped the old wrists and brought the cup to a level with the sunken lips.

"Here, Granddame," she said in a tone of suave courtesy in singular contrast with the violence of her preceding gesture. "Here is the wine to make you sleep."

The old lips touched the brim. A flame seemed to envelope Mahlee. No, no, not yet! She had one supreme question to ask that ancient soul before she turned devil and damned it! She drew the cup away, and again laid her grip upon Madame Ling's wrists, bringing her face down so low that it almost touched the waxen mask of the other. She said no word, but slowly in answer to the imperative power of the girl's gaze, the soul of Madame Ling rose from its abysses to the surface of the old oblique eyes. Miracle of the miracle! Mahlee, at the sight of it forgot her fury of revenge; she saw, indeed, deceit, avarice, and superstition as bottomless as dead pools. But now, as her grip tightened, and her gaze grew more imperative something never before visible broke from its prison of pride and struggled—anguished—into life.

May one understand by what throes a great passion is born? From the bottomless gulfs of being, below the caverns of lies and abominations, a purifying flame

of love arose in the soul of Madame Ling. The girl's necessity had conjured it. It came panic-stricken, hastening in fear that the mortal weakness of the body, doomed so soon to dissolution, should fail its new immortality. It burned, as it rose, the entrails of those ancient vices; it consumed them utterly in pure sacrifice, and stood finally triumphant before the girl in vestal dignity. Mahlee trembled and leaned down still more as the old lips moved.

"Give me the cup!" they said, "I will be accursed for your sake and the sake of your mother to whom I have done an exceeding evil."

Smoke of the sacrifice!

She had guessed the girl's intention in its inmost subtlety.

Mahlee flung the cup to the floor where it broke into a hundred pieces. At that moment she saw the beautiful Goddess of Mercy gently take to her arms a wan little shadow and bear it across a dark river to a shining open gate beyond;—Nirvana! Ah, this had been the true way then! Not through revenge but through love her mother's spirit had reached the bosom of Buddha! Mahlee dropped on her knees and buried her head upon the old woman's sunken breast.

"Granddame!" she cried in a hushed whisper, "I will do to the uttermost what the gods require!"

Was it indeed well or ill that Madame Ling's passion had not delayed for a moment its utterance? The old woman had stretched out her hand for the cup in one supreme token of abnegation. A moment ago she would have had strength to drain it to the dregs had it been given her; but now her mind was too feeble for further effort. She could not even follow the meaning of the girl's reply. She had lapsed into a gentle stupor out of which a simple human desire only made itself evident.

"Lie by me to-night, granddaughter," she murmured.

She was feeling again the groping hands of the little Mahlee at her breasts. The dumb beggar!

With a cry of joy, Mahlee extinguished the wick and folded her long arms about the body on the *kang*. It was cold in her embrace. She hugged it the closer, and crooned over it until they both slept—the old woman in the stupor of approaching death.

Somewhere in a distant court of a temple a bonze struck a great bell. Once, twice, three times it pealed, fearful, majestic, memorial—the voice of the Buddhist Trinity.

Mahlee struggled out of her sleep. The morning had now come. Madame Ling was gasping in her arms.

“Wine! My son! My best robe!”

Mahlee snatched up the wine and called loudly for Yang-Ling. A few drops of the mixture passed through the blue lips, quieting the spasms of the body. Mahlee bent over her grandmother.

“Has the moment come?”

“It is here!”

The girl flung strong arms about the inert heap, dragging it off the *kang* into an upright armchair. With one hand free she was able to pull from the teak-wood chest a heavily embroidered silk robe, bought years ago for this moment. She shook out its brilliant folds and enwrapped Madame Ling in it.

“Do not fear! You look very handsome. You will be noticed by any god.”

“By any god!” the old woman echoed with a dreamy smile, while Mahlee groped for something else in the teak-wood chest. Ah, here it was! The blade came out of its old lacquer sheath with rusty reluctance. She passed her finger over the edge. It would be sharp enough if she pressed hard! She bent over the armchair and scanned Madame Ling’s face. A film was forming over the oblique old eyes.

The moment had come, indeed !

To Mahlee the room seemed full of spirits, good and evil, divinities and devils, all waiting in breathless suspense to see if she would fulfil her vow !

"Granddame !" she cried in a tone of brilliant clarity, "sit up and watch, I will do it now."

At the command the withered form straightened in its gorgeous apparel and watched with insensible, glazing eyes. Mahlee broke into an anguished sweat and stooped to her task. Again she bared her feet.

"Look ! Granddame, look ! your love is repaid !"

A fine line of crimson mingled with the rust on the edge of the blade and grew wider and wider as the girl's jaw closed tight and the strength of her young arms became heavy against the weapon. The glazing eyes of Madame Ling had followed the preparatory movements stupidly ; then, as the first line of crimson showed, with the intelligence of one in a hypnotic sleep ; at last open-lidded, wide with complete comprehension.

"Help ! Yang-Ling ! Yang-Ling !" she called. But the coffin-maker, deep in his wine in a remote chamber of the court, heeded not.

And now the devils shrank back and the divinities applauded. Madame Ling rose in her state robe of death, took a step forward, stooped, seized the knife from Mahlee's hands and hurled it across the room ! The next instant she had fallen forward dead over the fainting form of her granddaughter.

When an hour later the Ya-bah, or deaf-mute, from the Ark of the Covenant Mission, stood at the door of Madame Ling's chamber and saw what was within, he made a sound as of some stricken animal. Then he stooped and laid his hands over the Eurasian's heart. It was still beating weakly. With a harsh articulation of joy, he threw off his outer garment and tore into

strips the linen shirt he wore beneath. With them he bound tightly the girl's bleeding ankles. The gods be thanked! the knife had not reached the arteries.

And now, stripped to the waist like a runner, the Ya-bah, who was a man of powerful strength, gathered up the slender form of the girl in his arms and ran. He ran through the old streets bleak in the November morning, down lonely labyrinthine alleys where only mangy dogs and clouds of poisonous dust attended upon his heels, past interminable rows of grey, wretched houses, and finally out through the squalid splendour of Peking's great highways. He paused once to shift his burden and then sped on, along gilded shop-fronts carved with chimera and gargoyle, under delicate memorial arches upborne like painted ribbons between slender mast-like columns, in and out through the day's awakening trade; carts, mules, donkeys, and camels; men, women and children, crawling like ants into the cold light of the streets. He heeded neither gibes nor threats, but ran on.

At last he stopped before a great oaken gate and beat upon it with fierce knuckles. It was opened by a frightened old watchman.

"The Ya-bah with a pack on his back! Great Buddha! a girl!"

But the Ya-bah was already across the court, leaping up the low steps of a verandah and swinging open the door beyond. . . .

Some time after the Ya-bah's exit with Mahlee from Madame Ling's chamber, Yang-Ling, the coffin-maker, aroused at last from his lethargy, stood on the threshold peering in. The blood on the floor and the prostrate figure of the old woman penetrated his half-inebriated sense confusedly. He stooped and began to finger the pattern on the embroidered robe.

"Why, it's a rose," he said, like one who makes a

momentous discovery ; “ a purple rose, and she’s dead, and needs to be put into her coffin.”

Whereupon he carried the body of the old dame to its coffin in the courtyard, and tucked in the folds of the gaudy dress with great care.

BOOK I
AT THE ARK OF THE
COVENANT

I

FOR more than a quarter of a century previous to the Boxer outbreak in 1900, the Ark of the Covenant Mission in Pekin had its headquarters in a populous district not far from the northern rampart of the Manchu City, where the white belfry of its chapel showed above a high brick wall separating the mission compound from a narrow passage-way, known as Pheasant Lane. This solid length of masonry was broken at an interval of about a hundred yards by two immense oaken gates heavily bolted at night with iron bars and guarded during the day by two old watchmen seated like a dual Cerberus, one before each portal. The top of the wall bristled with spikes, thorns, and sharp bits of broken glass intended to ensnare the feet of thieves or feline prowlers.

If the seeker of truth desiring admittance to the Halls of the "New Doctrine" could stand unabashed before this somewhat formidable defence, and throwing a sop in the form of a few copper *cash* to the old watchmen, accept as invitation to enter, a grunt or growl at east or west gate respectively, he would find himself in a series of courts and alley-ways leading into a large central quadrangle of a singular Eurasian appearance. Here, ornamental arcades connected in long parallels two dwelling-houses of the better style of Chinese architecture, which, standing face to face, thus completed the square of the court. In the four corners of the enclosure the large paving-stones were removed to permit the growth of trees and flowering shrubs, among which lilacs of white and purple bloom showed so

luxuriant a growth that the quadrangle came to be named the Court of Lilacs. But the dry air of spring was sweet, too, with the pollen of other blossoms—flowering almond, jasmine, pomegranate and azalea—a part of the fragrant load slipping, no doubt, from the overburdened loins of the bees lingering all day about their honeyed labours. From the midst of each mass of shrubbery a tree grew with precise elegance. In the north-west corner, a crab-apple tree, freshly pink each April, leaned slightly towards a straight young persimmon tree on the opposite side ; while in the southern angles of the court, an ancient mulberry and locust threw shades as deep as twilight upon the green tile unicorns and other monsters which guarded the corners of the projecting roofs. Although the arrangement of the court was distinctly Oriental, there was something even in the exterior aspect of the two dwellings, joined so neighbourly by their covered walks, which showed signs of adaptation to Western needs. For example, the windows of translucent rice paper, stretched over an ornamental lattice, so characteristic a feature of native houses, had been replaced by glass, set in sashes, opening on to the verandahs. These porches were protected from the sun by overhanging eaves supported on wooden pillars, and were further shaded in summer by large green awnings. The central entrance doors of the two houses were provided with latches and bronze knockers of a pattern seen most often on doors of old country manses. But the sloping green-tiled roofs with their unicorns, dragons and gargoyles in faïence, the arcades held up by their slender carved pillars painted in faded reds and blues and greens, the stone lions which guarded the porches, the rockery and broken fountain in the middle of the court, all spoke of a past Oriental magnificence in strange union now with a New World simplicity.

This indeed had once been the audience court of a

great mandarin, careful in his life time to build short disconnected walls in front of each ancestral gate to keep out the *fêng-shui* or mischievous spirits of the air—literally, wind and water demons—which, reported to travel only in straight lines, are so believed to be quite powerless to dodge wall corners. If accounts are to be trusted, the superstitious mandarin, become now, in turn, an Ancestor, must more than once have tickled the great yellow dragon hidden under grave-yards in his eagerness to leave his huge canal-boat of a coffin for nocturnal ramblings about the old familiar courts. At least, his besotted heir, an opium-eating nephew with a harem of wives, found that uneasy soul unpleasant company, and so moved by fear, and also, as was rumoured, by the need of paying off his most pressing gambling debts, the young man had put the entire estate on sale for a few thousand taels. It was bought by Dr. Alexander Templeton, senior representative in Peking of the foreign mission board of a certain religious sect in America, and became known thenceforth as the Ark of the Covenant Mission. And here it must be noted that immediately after the purchase of the property and establishment of the mission, the old mandarin's spirit, overawed, one must believe, by the symbols of a new religion, sank back into a repose never more to be broken.

A few years of Western ingenuity had changed the place from a chill and decayed old palace into a modern mission station with its practical equipment of chapel, hospital, school houses and missionary homes. In the Women's Court, now transformed into the Women's hospital yard, where the *tai-tais* or ladies of rank had once sat in pinch-toed elegance over their tea and chess, gat-toothed beldames and mothers with nursing babes now cooled themselves in leisurely convalescence; while, in the adjoining court, where the mandarin's nephew and his evil companions had drowsed long hours away

in opium stupor, a bevy of clean frocked school boys was turned loose daily for afternoon kite flying or top spinning. In the south-west corner of the compound, the white chapel with its belfry stood comfortably guarded between two ancestral tablets rising thirty feet in the air from the backs of enormous stone tortoises, symbols of perpetual peace.

Behind it, in a separate quadrangle, stood the Chinese girls' school in care of the two maiden ladies, Miss Rebecca Dorn and Miss Claribel McGinnis, who had their rooms in the building; with them was Dr. Eliza Kennedy, also unmarried, who directed the Women's hospital; while in a house beyond the school, lived the Parmelee family, man, wife and three children. Finally, the two dwellings in the mandarin's audience court had likewise become the homes for the expounders of the "New Doctrine"; the one on the northern side of the quadrangle being occupied by Dr. and Mrs. Templeton and their adopted daughter, Mahlee, the Eurasian girl; and the other, by the Reverend Andrew Handel, a young divine of six years' residence in the mission who was expecting soon to share his bachelor quarters with a new medical missionary now nearing Peking.

II

IN a low rectangular building in one of the remoter courts of these spacious ecclesiastical premises, the women's class of "gospel inquirers" met three times a week for religious instruction. In the year of grace 1899, the meetings had been more than usually popular. And now between seven and eight o'clock of a chill evening in early spring, the wooden benches placed in rows before a square earthenware stove at the end of the room were rapidly filling with the inquirers coming with Pilate's question on their lips.

The women, almost without exception from the working class, were dressed in the uniform blue cotton garments of the poor Chinese which were still heavily wadded as in the winter season. The natural loose folds of tunic and pantaloons were thus destroyed, held out stiffly by the padding, which lent to their wearers an exaggerated amplitude. One of the younger women was already busy by the stove with a pair of foreign bellows with which she was fanning the coals to such ardour that the earthenware sides of the small furnace were quickly becoming red-hot. This was the centre around which the inquirers grouped themselves, pulling towards it the wooden benches and bringing out their hands from the depth of their long sleeves to warm over it. Except for a half-dozen Manchus, the women were all small-footed. The race now dominant has never, indeed, tolerated foot-binding. Yet a few of the Manchu women present had made some concession to the caprices of elegant foot-gear by attaching squarely in the centre of their embroidered slippers a high heel upon which they walked as upon a pair of stilts. The

Manchus were likewise distinguishable from the others by their coiffure: over a wooden bar with spade-shaped ends placed horizontally across the back of the head, the hair was wound like coarse black silk on a bobbin and stiffly glued down with paste made of quince seeds. Several of the young matrons had thrust little silver and gold spikes into this structure, and wore an artificial flower behind each ear. The Chinese women had their hair arranged at the nape of the neck in a stiff projection curving upward like the bowl of a spoon. All without exception wore earrings, for no woman or girl in China is too poor to be unprovided with this badge of her sex. These were for the most part large silver and gilt pendants, chased in floral designs, or wrought in filigree patterns, occasionally with oval pieces of jade attached. In several cases the rings were so heavy as to have elongated the ear-lobe to twice its natural size, as well as increasing the original perforation to the bigness of a pea.

The room, lighted indifferently by a European lamp set on the ledge of a lattice window, was long and narrow, with pavement of square grey bricks uncovered by mat or carpet; a few scrolls with scripture texts in large Chinese characters hung on the walls. Besides these, there was one other article of furniture. This was an armchair in ebony, very solid, square and stiff, with no carving save in the arms which terminated in the heads of two fabulous beasts, survivals of some forgotten mythology, it would be impossible to say of what epoch or country.

The placing of this chair seemed to constitute an important ceremony for the inquirers. A dozen suggestions were made as to the precise spot it should occupy before it was finally pushed and hauled to the wall next the court and set below the lattice of translucent rice paper whose ledge supported the foreign lamp. Sombre and massive, it had the appearance of a throne awaiting

its occupant, with the obtruding heads of the fabulous beasts ready to act as body-guards. In truth its air was but little in keeping with the Christian cheerfulness of the scripture texts on the walls and the child-like expectancy on the faces of the women gathered there to hear the "good tidings." Those in the room knew only that it belonged to the "Kuniang"—an inheritance, it was said, from her grandmother, a Chinese beldame, who, antique herself, had had a passion for collecting things savouring of a still more remote antiquity. The women reseated themselves and renewed their chatter.

"Have the honourable ladies heard the news?" asked the young Manchu woman, who had been busy with the bellows, now rising from her efforts. She daintily blew the soot from the silver filigree shields protecting her long nails.

News! the women pressed around her. No, they had heard none. Would Loh *tai-tai* (Mrs. Loh) courteously deign to explain?

The young matron seated herself on a bench and leisurely adjusted the artificial flowers behind her ears. "The felicitous arrival of an august new foreign doctor is expected to-night" she began, and was cut short by a half blind crone.

"Humph! A new foreign devil, say rather; aye, twice and thrice devil, yet only half foreign at that! But mark me," she ended with a vindictive grumble. "A fish sports in the kettle but his life will not be long!"

This oracular utterance at once turned the attention of the women to the new speaker. "A fish in the kettle! Only half foreign!" they exclaimed. "Be pleased to reveal to us your honourable meaning, Huang-ma (mother Huang)."

"Aye, I will reveal it!" answered the old crone emphatically, "for though the stubborn teeth may perish,

the yielding tongue endures, and mine is still limber enough when needful to speak against an enemy."

"An enemy, Huang-ma!" pouted the pretty Manchu, displeased at the interruption of her own story, "Why, the new doctor has not yet arrived! What harm can he have done you?"

Huang-ma's bleary eyes brightened with some old anger. "Harm!" she cried. "Mayhap you would call it good, my girl, if your winter's rice and coal depended upon your summer's sale of eggs, to wake up one fine morning and see the necks of every fowl in the coop wrung. Mayhap you would thank the neck-wringer for his kind favours and call that day a Feast of Lanterns, and ogle him with your pretty eyes." She wagged her head in exaggerated irony.

"And was it the new doctor who did you this turn?" asked Loh *tai-tai* incredulously.

"Aye," answered the old woman. "He it was in truth and no other, since your august foreign physician is nothing more than Sam Wang, the Eurasian." She pronounced the name with concentrated contempt.

A dozen hands went up in horror. "Sam Wang! that child of a monkey back again in the mission!"

"Even so," replied Huang-ma, enjoying the effect of her oratory. "Back again to cure the sick and expound the Gesu-words. Yet mark me well," she repeated, nodding her head sententiously, "A fish sports in the kettle but his life will not be long."

The room was in a hubbub—the name of Sam Wang bandied about like a shuttlecock, his history given in twenty versions. Old Huang-ma was not the only one who had scores against Sam Wang. All who had been connected with the Ark of the Covenant for a half dozen years remembered the bad Eurasian boy of the mission school and his "monkey tricks." One very small-footed woman, wife of the cook in the boys' school, told of how he had once caught hold of her and made

her unbind her feet in the presence of himself and his two wicked companions who had burst into a roar of laughter at the sight of her bent toes. And ever after, she said, they had mocked her by calling out "Lily-buds!" when she appeared. "Certainly, it is the greatest shame of my life," the poor creature ended with tears in her eyes. And indeed for a Chinese woman a greater indignity could scarcely be conceived.

Those who had nothing real to relate invented preposterous fables for the occasion. One little woman, with baby cheeks painted a bright carmine, vowed that in coming to service one moonlight night she had distinctly seen Sam Wang in the chapel-yard hanging from a tree head downwards.

"By what?" queried a scandalised listener.

"By his tail!" whispered back the little woman.

"An enormous tail seven yards long."

"Yes, yes," agreed the pretty Manchu eagerly, caught by the contagion of gossip. "Seventy yards long! But when I saw it he was using it as a whip to scourge his comrades because they would not give him all their supper."

Suddenly, from a street not far distant where the Great Drum Tower stood, a booming sound arose. For the Tartar city, it was the setting of the night watch; for the women, the evening signal for prayer. Instantly, fifty pairs of almond-shaped eyes were rivetted upon the door.

The slight latticed frame opened without sound and a young woman of about twenty, clad in a long straight garment of some dark woollen fabric, entered, and looking neither to the right nor left, advanced slowly—almost stiffly—as if keeping step to some measure of processional music unheard by the others.

The features of the girl were singular. Under slightly divergent brows and heavy oval lids, held half closed like a Buddha's, her eyes showed azure with gaze

slow and vague. Over the brow and face, with the just detectable Mongolian prominence of cheek bone smoothing down into a fine curve about a firm English chin, rested a saint-like placidity—austerity, one might have called it, had the red upper lip, slightly parted from its mate, displayed a less luxurious curve over a set of teeth as strong as stone and white as those of a young carnivorous animal. A certain sensitiveness in the nostrils, discoverable by a keen observer, might also have brought up a reminiscence of something not entirely tamed. The nose was distinctly European, finely chiselled, with nothing of the Mongolian osseous quality of the brow or upper cheek, but with a natural suggestion of petulance and wilfulness—even perhaps of insolence. Her hair, black and abundant, with a disposition to curl, was secured behind her neck in a complicated braiding, as in the female coiffures depicted on ancient Assyrian or Egyptian sculptures. It formed thus a heavy veil about her head, so close and impenetrable as to be almost a hood, like the cowl, one might fancy, of some unknown religious order.

The complexion of this strange creature was yellow, and seemed to radiate in the semi-gloom of the room, a peculiar metallic lustre like the gilding on a graven image. As she walked, her long arms hung straight downward at her sides with the heaviness of inanimate things. They ended in archaic gold-coloured hands, with fingers stiff, far apart, and attenuated to excess, tapering off into nails like polished bits of ivory. Her extraordinary height, as measured at least by any Chinese standard of tallness for women, as well as the slenderness of her figure, with its discreet lines of bust and hip, still further emphasised this resemblance to an effigy of some forgotten goddess.

Reaching the massive armchair by the lattice, she sat down between the heads of the fabulous beasts, and folding her hands in her lap looked straight out in front

of her without seeming to notice the presence of the women. Yet at sight of her seated thus, the heads of all those present fell forward over their breasts.

The meeting had begun with silent prayer !

III

WHEN the wordless prayer was at an end, the young woman opened a Chinese Bible and read to the assembly. Her voice was low, the enunciation curiously nice. As the sentences detached themselves from her lips, one had the impression of listening to the slow breaking off and falling of icicles in motionless air. Yet this frigidity of tone was acquired—momently controlled—by a conscious and sustained effort of the will. One felt power in leash here. For there was no trace of listlessness in this young woman's passivity. Rather, negation had become in her a positive force—an intense cold which scorched like fire. She read the eighteenth chapter of St. John.

“Pilate saith unto him, what is truth?”

Her voice broke off with clean abruptness.

The women, who had been leaning forward on their chairs, suddenly straightened up as if at the breaking of a spell. “What is truth? What is truth?” they echoed with clamorous eagerness. “Yes, that is what we have come to learn. Tell us, Kuniang, what is truth?”

“Aye, tell us, Kuniang, what is truth?” a mocking voice repeated.

A young man, wearing a shabby European overcoat, lounged in the doorway, complacently regarding the scene. Although not above the average height, he gave, as he advanced towards the lamp, the impression of great size. He was barrel-chested, with strong loins and arms outlined in formidable muscles. His large

head, covered with thick black hair, coarse and straight as a horse's mane, was supported between the shoulders by a short, massive neck, the cords of which appeared almost swollen. In facial traits less European than Mongolian, the man's frame was yet more powerfully built than that of any ordinary Chinese. He was possessed, too, of hands and feet which would have been a scandal even for a male inhabitant of the Flowery Kingdom.

His present appearance at the Inquirers' meeting was sufficiently diverting. At the sound of his voice, old Huang-ma rose from her bench and shook a palsied fist at him.

"Sam Wang! Sam Wang!" she shrilled in fierce falsetto. "Sam Wang, the Eurasian!"

A kind of panic ensued in which the thirst for truth was forgotten and superstition again ran riot. For at the name of the Eurasian, half the women were on their absurd little feet, backing themselves by energetic hobbles into the shadowy corners of the room whence they eyed the intruder with palpitating alarm.

"Sam Wang! Sam Wang!" came from every side.

"His tail!" cried the baby-cheeked little woman, seizing the silver filigree nail protectors of the young Manchu.

Her companion shook her off, and catching up the bellows began to blow the air before her as if to oppose the devil with a hurricane. The others huddled themselves behind her.

And certainly the man as he now came under the direct rays of the lamp looked ugly enough to inspire dread in the breasts of the timid; his skin was yellow; he had salient cheek bones, and oblique, coal-black eyes moving perpetually in restless and bold enquiry above a massive, irregular nose and an enormous slit of a mouth which closed like a steel trap. But it was an ugliness redeemed from actual repulsiveness by its in-

tense virility. Attila, King of the Huns, might have looked like Sam Wang!

One, alone, in the assembly, had kept her self-control. This was the leader of the meeting. It is true that at the intrusion even she had been startled to an ejaculation of surprise, followed by a quick angry lifting of heavy eye-lids. Then, as she witnessed the panic of the women, a dull flush mounted to her cheeks and burnt them to the hue of old copper. But her voice was still steady and cold as she arose to her feet and, ignoring the stranger, made a gesture of dismissal towards her scattered audience. The disorder ceased abruptly as she spoke.

"At the sounding of the watch on the 16th of the moon the seekers of truth will assemble again. The present meeting is at an end."

The women were glad to escape. The pretty Manchu headed the retreat, almost snorting with her bellows in the face of Sam Wang as she passed him. Clinging to her, came her baby-faced friend, pale under her rouge. The others followed, clip-clapping, whispering indignant protests against this bold fellow who had dared to interrupt the Kuniang and break up the meeting. Huang-ma, groping her way out in the rear of the procession, turned on the sill.

"Mark me well," she shrilled in final invective, "a fish sports in the kettle, but his life will not be long!"

Meanwhile, the object of so much mingled terror and scorn stood smiling blandly, enjoying the excitement he had created.

"Thank you, Huang-ma," he said, bowing to the old crone, although speaking in English. "A sufficiently good prophecy from an old Cassandra like yourself! I am delighted to see that you all remember me. My welcome back among you is certainly most gratifying."

With the words, he shut the door with a click on the faces of the women who were already beginning to crowd

back, impelled by a curiosity which conquered fear. But the Manchu remembered the lattice window, and in a moment a score of fingers were being poked through the rice paper and almond-shaped eyes applied to the round perforations. Sam Wang alone with the Kuniang! What a scandal! Certainly it was their duty to watch and see that no sacrilege was done to their divinity.

But the divinity seemed equal to the occasion. Standing by the ebony armchair, she waited with unrelaxed facial muscles as if before an unknown worshipper to whom no favour was to be shown. 'This attitude, although winning the approbation of the watchful "inquirers," failed to embarrass the young man.

"A thousand pardons for my intrusion, Kuniang," he said lightly, turning from the door. "The truth is I'm just back after a five years' absence, and, wishing to explore the old place a bit before announcing myself, adopted the biblical thief's method of getting into the sheepfold. In short," he explained, grinning, "I've just dropped down over the wall."

"The wall?" echoed the girl, surprised out of her silence.

"Yes, I remembered some footholds in the masonry which I found useful as a boy, and thought I could escape detection in this remote end of the compound. But your light here gave me a scare. I imagined Handel would be rushing out with a 'Welcome, Brother!' and wondering why the devil I had chosen such a mode of entrance into my new life. Then I heard your voice—a cold siren call which led me straight over your threshold." He looked at her with bold curiosity. "You know, you had half hypnotised me like the others, and I had to do something to break the spell."

Then, as he saw the flush of displeasure deepening her cheeks, he added with clumsy sincerity:

"But I meant no harm, and really had no intention of scattering your flock."

The recollection of the scene, however, proved too much for him. His enormous mouth twitched with an effort to restrain his mirth; then he burst into a loud laugh.

"Holy Buddha! The devil himself couldn't have stirred up a prettier panic! I thought the little Manchu would puff me off the planet with her bellows! And old Huang-ma, I see, hasn't forgotten the slaughter of her innocents!—'A fish sports in the kettle, but his life will not be long!'" he imitated in shrill falsetto. "Ha! ha!" But—"straightening himself with forced formality, "I am offending you again. After the very cordial reception tendered me by your late audience, an introduction of myself is superfluous, but am I not correct in guessing you to be Miss Templeton, daughter of my old friends in this mission?"

He had cleverly turned his apology into an easy means of presentation and was now standing unabashed before her. The girl's eyes narrowed at him suspiciously as if she doubted the sincerity of his conjecture.

"No, I am not Miss Templeton," she replied stiffly, speaking her English with a slight accent. "Although I live with Dr. and Mrs. Templeton, I have never taken their name. I have no other name than Mahlee." She brought out the last words as if under compulsion.

The effect of them on the big man before her was singular. He seemed for a moment almost embarrassed.

"Oh, yes, I have heard the story. You are then the Eurasian girl who came to the mission the year after I left?"

"Yes, if *you*"—she paused slightly on the pronoun—"are, as I suppose, Dr. Wang?"

He nodded. "Sam Wang, Eurasian like yourself." Then, as if obeying some unusual impulse of sympathy, he extended his huge hand towards hers, and immediately

elicited a cry of indignation from the watchers at the lattice.

"He is trying to touch her! What a scandal!" They had just time to note with satisfaction that the hand was ignored before Wang was leaping to the window.

"What a scandal!" he roared back, and made such a frightful grimace that the simple creatures took to waddling flight like a flock of scared geese. Freed from his indiscreet audience, Sam Wang drew a pair of heavy foreign curtains over the window and waved for the girl to be seated. He himself dropped down on a bench opposite her armchair. Her quick shrinking at his outstretched hand had not escaped his notice, and his bantering manner returned.

"You will not shake hands? Well, the custom is foolish enough, certainly. Let us begin in Chinese fashion then. How old are you?"

As there was no response save an involuntary raising of eyebrows, he began to count on his fingers. "I think I can reckon it up; you say you have been here four years, and when you came you were a girl of sixteen."

"I did not say that," Mahlee objected.

"No, but *I* say it. I begin to remember the story perfectly. . . . Four and sixteen make twenty, and to be polite in this preposterous old country, I must double the figure. My dear Kuniang," he ended with staid conviction, "you surely do not look a day less than forty, and that without flattering you in the least."

In spite of herself the occupant of the archaic throne smiled; it was as if the spring sunshine had passed for an instant over a glacier-bound region. The young man was charmed.

"Forty!" he ejaculated sadly, pursuing his pleasantry. "And I am but twenty-two, or, at most, twenty-three or four; it depends on my exact age when they picked

me off the bund at Shanghai. I fear I must seem very immature to you?"

He looked anxiously at her as if awaiting encouragement from one of advancing years and dignity before venturing to continue the conversation. Her brows contracted in a slight frown, rebuking her late smile. This banter was scarcely to her taste; but the man, himself, she felt, was not to be lightly waved aside.

"We have a saying here in old China," she said precisely, "that one thread does not make a rope, nor one swallow a summer. Therefore, I try to form no hasty judgments of any one."

She arose with a sort of finality which forbade his following, and moved towards the door. But already something was gone from her processional gait. There was a slight unsteadiness in her movement as of a woman conscious of being stared after. On reaching the sill she turned half way around. "Good evening, Dr. Wang," she said, and passed out.

Left to himself, Sam Wang usurped the throne with a laugh, tilting it back in an irreverent and perilous manner as he stretched out his heavy legs over a bench. He laughed for fully five minutes after the young woman's exit, as if struck by some idea inordinately droll.

"Isis, or Diana of the Ephesians, leading a gospel meeting! Well, I can be her sacred Bull! A holy couple we'll make!"

But his hilarity spent itself as he continued:

"Yes, the whole story comes back to me. . . . An old witch of a grandmother who demanded the sacrifice of the girl's feet, and the child actually tried to cut them off to gratify the old lady's whim. I remember—she let out the whole thing in her delirium after she was brought here. A capital tract for the Reverend Andrew Handel! 'Example of Misguided Heroism,' sent to me with Christmas greetings by its author four years ago."

He grinned. "It's the one tract I ever read, and in spite of its reeking odour of sanctity, the story itself made a vivid impression. I thought at the time, I'd come back here some day and marry that girl. God!" he exclaimed, his imagination suddenly fired anew, "what consummate nerve or nervelessness! Only a true Asiatic could have done it. Yet, if I'm not much mistaken, she has all the intelligence of some damnable white father in her too."

His eyes roamed about the room, glittering with some inward pleasure. Then they rested on the scriptural scrolls hung to the walls and instantly flamed with a new light.

"We'll celebrate our home coming by getting rid of some of this rubbish," he said, and rising from his chair began to jerk the scrolls down rudely from their nails and stuff them without more ceremony into the earthenware stove where they were at once in bright conflagration. Then he extinguished the lamp with a puff from his nostrils, that he might better enjoy the flames. In their flare his face showed uncouthly like the rude enormous features of some primitive sculpturing splashed over with ruddy paint.

"My day is not lost," he mused. "It is a good beginning. Would that I could so easily make a bonfire of all their Holy Scriptures!"

Then something like remorse may have touched him in thinking of his benefactors.

"Gratitude! gratitude!" he muttered as if haunted by the sound of a foreign word, the sense of which escaped him. "It must be for higher breeds than mine! I hate them all—the ones who have been most kind most of all!"

He turned in the shadows towards the ebony arm-chair, and the hate in his eyes died out. "But *she*," his face took on a sudden sobriety, "is my own kind—in our veins the same two discordant bloods of East and

West for ever in secret and deadly feud." Then he broke into half whimsical exultation. "Mahlee! Mahlee!" he exclaimed, "mysterious, ambiguous name!"

He approached more closely the vacant throne and made an exaggerated salaam. "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" he cried.

IV

It was now more than four years since the Eurasian girl, Mahlee, had been carried unconscious on the back of the Ya-bah to the Ark of the Covenant Mission. What deep instinct had then prompted the dumb man to take his burden straight into the little nursery bedroom of Pearl, child of the missionaries, who had gone but lately to find "home comforts" in a boarding school beyond the seas, leaving the hearts of her parents desolate? He had laid the girl on the child's bed, and with a long anxious look had discreetly withdrawn. How, indeed, might a Ya-bah speak of love to his beloved? But the missionaries had found her there, and with that charity which vaunteth not itself, but touched with deep pity for human suffering, ministers to it gladly and tenderly, they had nursed the young girl whole again from her self-inflicted wounds.

At first she had been delirious with pain, and had called plaintively for her old grandmother. But in a few days she regained her full consciousness and smiled a strange oblique smile from narrow eyes at Mrs. Templeton, who came to her bedside. Then she asked tremulously for news of Madame Ling, and when she learned that the old woman was dead, she turned her face to the wall and so remained for a long while mute and motionless. Indeed the only words she ever said about the matter were in regard to the two jade bowls.

"I must put them in the coffin with her," she was heard to whisper. "She could not sleep in peace without them."

She accepted at once, but with a curious silence, the new faith presented to her by the missionaries. In

truth, in this first crucial contact with the foreign race—the great white race of her paternal ancestry—she appeared strangely docile, receiving without question all that was taught her with the submissive willingness of one come back at last to her birthright and ready to be instructed in regard to it.

Thus it was that she embraced Christianity, less as a religion of the heart than as a necessary factor in the new racial career into which she seemed to be purposely and consciously entering.

But she delayed the ceremony of her baptism until she had concluded with punctilious piety all the heathen rites connected with her grandmother's burial. According to the old dame's wish, her wizened body was embalmed and lay in state in its coffin for some weeks previous to its interment. After the lapse of this time, Mahlee had sufficiently recovered from her wounds to attend the obsequies, which in spite of the extreme poverty of the household were conducted with no little pomp. Indeed, Yang-Ling, the coffin-maker, put a certain professional pride into the occasion. He painted a red dragon on each side of the new coffin as a last touch to its beauty, and hired a dozen mourners dressed in white cotton garments and carrying gaudy silken banners to wail in the funeral possession. So Madame Ling, arrayed in purple and scarlet, with the priceless jade bowls cushioned in folds of silk beside her, was laid to rest in an old burying-ground outside the city, with the painted dragons as body guards to scare away any too "dominant influences" which might have been inclined to disturb her repose.

Mahlee, looking strangely gaunt in her white mourning robes, came back to the Ark of the Covenant and was baptised immediately into the Christian Church. Now, after less than five years' residence, she was recognised as one of the most active and valuable assistants in the mission.

She had in some measure taken the place of the child Pearl in the house in the Court of Lilacs, where she occupied the child's old room and was treated almost as a daughter by the Templetons. At first, it is true, they had put her in the mission school for Chinese girls, but she was not there three days before she rebelled.

"Let me stay in your house and learn English and become a foreigner like you, or else send me back to my old home in the coffin-yard," she demanded imperiously, although with lips which quivered. The missionaries, lonely in the absence of their own child, at once consented to her staying with them. It is probable that they understood the reason for Mahlee's discontent at the school, although the girl gave none. She was not a person to state her reasons, yet once her eyelids lifted angrily and she said: "I am better than they! I am stronger and more intelligent than all of them—puny little slaves!"

Had the old twits and gibes which she had had to suffer all her life from her heathen relatives in the coffin-yard renewed themselves among the native girls at the mission? Her new guardians, of tender hearts and consciences, appeared to feel, at least, an almost personal responsibility towards this poor child outraged in her very birth by one of the white race. The kindness they lavished upon her seemed impelled by a desire to expiate their own guilt, as if they were in some way accountable for the misdeeds of all those born under the flag of a Christian nation. The girl, in her turn, accepted what was done for her as if it were her due, without demonstration either of gratitude or affection yet with a never-failing courtesy towards her foster-parents.

Of Mahlee's intelligence there was no question. She learned rapidly, gaining in a few years a quaint familiarity with such books as she found in the mission, including the Bible, the Westminster Catechism, Fox's Book of Martyrs, Milton, Shakespeare, and a few

standard English novels. Besides her reading, she had regular lessons with Mrs. Templeton in composition, history, geography and arithmetic, and later, was taught Latin and botany by Dr. Templeton himself.

Although she never returned to the mission school, Mahlee was not without instruction likewise in Chinese literature and penmanship. The Ya-bah, or deaf-mute, who previous to his being picked up from the streets by the child Pearl and brought to the Ark of the Covenant, bore the proud title of "Most Eminent Scribe, Poet and Ambassador of the Man-in-the-Moon. . . . Of excellent skill in sonnets, proverbs, and epigrams, whether felicitous or ironic"—had become a general amanuensis in the mission. If his career were more mundane than of yore, he had, at least, the distinct advantage of being fed, clothed, and sheltered in his later position. For the Man in the Moon, made callous, no doubt, by his own etherisation, had taken no account whatever of the corporeal necessities of his Ambassador who, in reality, as poor street-scribe, was all but starved to death when the little girl found him. In the mission, outside his general duties, the young man had found time to give lessons in Chinese penmanship to Mahlee, whom he openly adored, so that under his silent tutorage she learned to inscribe the marvellous old characters almost as exquisitely as did the Ya-bah himself. Afterwards she read the "Four Books" and "Five Classics"—Gospel and Pentateuch of all Chinese scholarship—with an old teacher wearing immense goggles framed in tortoise shell, who was employed for the newly-arrived missionaries in their acquisition of the language.

But for all this learning, the girl was still unwed. It had been understood indeed that at eighteen—already rather an advanced age for a bride in the Middle Kingdom—she would marry Ya-bah. This seemed to the missionaries a suitable match on the whole, in spite of

the young man's affliction ; for Mahlee was a silent spirit herself, and would have appeared more qualified than most young women to marry a deaf-mute. Then, too, both held an ambiguous relation to society. Moreover, the long and touching devotion of the Ya-bah to Mahlee—a most singular manifestation from a Chinese youth—seemed worth rewarding.

But on her eighteenth birthday, when the marriage ceremony was to have taken place, Mahlee declared that she would not wed for another year. Being pressed for her reasons, she could give none. She seemed unconsciously waiting for some event. Two months later, the Ya-bah was stricken with an obscure fever, brought on, it was said, by neglect of food and rest. He died dumbly as he had lived. During his illness he was quarantined for fear of possible contagion at the mission hospital for men which lay outside of the compound, so that Mahlee did not see him before his death.

His few possessions, aside from his clothes, fell to her. These were notably a collection of pens and a fine piece of soapstone upon which the ink-sticks were rubbed. The two had often used them together during Mahlee's lessons in penmanship. She believed they would be her last keepsakes of her poor lover. But in clothing the body for burial, Andrew Handel, who cared for the Ya-bah in his illness, found in the lining of the young scholar's best plum-coloured silk robe, which had been selected for his shroud, a number of folded papers forming a package of some bulk covered with the youth's exquisite hieroglyphics. At frequent intervals on the sheets between the Chinese characters, the word *Mahlee* occurred written in English. So quaint was the effect of this, that the name had almost the air of being a cabalistic sign—the pass-word to some dumb and esoteric region. It was, in truth, the key to the Ya-bah's soul. Seeing it, the young missionary discreetly handed the papers to Mahlee without further perusal.

They were a sonnet-series inscribed to her, dating back to the day she had been brought into the mission on the Ya-bah's back. The girl read them alone in her room, crying inconsolably over every separate sheet. But when she had read them all, she uttered a curious little ejaculation, half pitying, half ironical, and quickly folding them up into their original form, sewed them into the lining of a silken tunic of the colour of ashes of roses which the Ya-bah had bought for her from a pawn-dealer in the same year in which he had purchased his own plum-coloured robe. Then she took the pens and ink-stone and wrapped them about with the tunic, making the whole into a package of as small a compass as possible, which she slipped into an old blue cotton bolster case, once belonging to her grandmother. This she sewed up also, and going out furtively the night after the Ya-bah's funeral, buried it underneath a willow by the brink of a gold-fish pond, where she had many times sat in silent communication with her poor dumb lover. Had she loved the Ya-bah? She had never told him so—indeed, according to Chinese custom that would have been unmaidenly—but for years she had accepted his devotion and had believed that she would eventually marry him even though she had once delayed the ceremony. Was it then the romance of her life that she was burying in the old blue pillow-case, and only the whimsical moonlight playing about her lips which was responsible for the semblance of that stealthy smile as she knelt and patted back the last clod of earth to its place?

Certainly she never expressed in words any remorse for not having married the Ya-bah when she had promised, nor except at the reading of the sonnets, did she ever weep for him. Yet a change of some sort was apparent in her from the hour of her poor lover's death. The moods of fierce melancholy—a sort of impersonal vindictiveness at the injustice of her fate—which had hitherto beset her at frequent intervals, suddenly left

her entirely. Andrew Handel, noting the change, wrote to his mother in Vermont that the Eurasian had, at last, "experienced the new birth"—something more profound, it would appear from his description, than the ordinary conversion of a Chinese heathen—"causing in her case a mystic transformation of countenance and mien almost like that imaginable in a metempsychosis."

"The Temple of the Holy Ghost! The indwelling Christ!" he exclaimed at the close of the letter, rejoicing greatly, although somewhat awesomely, at the "growing unearthliness of the girl's face."

It was at this time, indeed, that the young divine was struck by Mahlee's resemblance to a certain masterpiece of the late Byzantine school which he had in his possession. The picture, a Madonna Enthroned, had descended to him with two or three other valuable relics from a defunct uncle, a famous missionary in Syria. Yielding to a singular impulse he presented it to the girl, commending it to her as a worthy pattern of virtue.

She hung the picture beside a mirror in her room, and thenceforth made it an object of almost Buddhistic adoration. She seemed, indeed, to mistake the crude formality of the old Christian art for that ideal of immobility which she had as blood heritage from her mother's people. Was there in her still superstitious brain some idea of winning merit in Heaven by accentuating a fancied resemblance to its queen? Did she perhaps dream of thus expiating the sin of a broken promise, or of a yet more subtle guilt—that exulting sense of escape—which had thrilled her involuntarily at the first tidings of her obscure lover's death? Possibly it was a line from one of the buried sonnets—the last written, it would seem, from the fresh appearance of the paper and ink, which was haunting her memory like the echo of remorse.

"Thou too, hast, made me an outcast and a mute."

However this may be, she certainly made her cult as painful as a penance, laboriously schooling her features and expression to accord more exactly with those of the old Byzantine masterpiece beside her mirror. If Christianity had been known to her in its Roman Catholic form, it is possible that Mahlee would have taken the veil at this time, and prostrated herself ever after at the feet of the blessed Lady of Heaven. But having been instructed in the Protestant faith, she was obliged to invent, as it were, a special Maryolatry of her own.

Under the influence of the Byzantine model, the girl's perfect natural grace, "like the poplar and the willow in the wind," came to be felt by her as a serious menace to her spiritual advancement, which must be combated at every instant. Yet it was only after more than twelve months of rigid self-discipline that Mahlee had attained to that degree of archaic stiffness essential to her conception of the Mother of God.

Andrew Handel, watching the girl with ascetic sympathy touched by curiosity, wrote again to his mother in Vermont: "The Eurasian's countenance now shows a sort of rapt passivity, which may at a given signal flame into the passion of a martyr or relapse to the complete immobility of a monolith graven with indecipherable ideographs."

V

FROM the meeting so rudely disorganised by Sam Wang's entrance, Mahlee had gone straight towards her own bed-chamber. In the hall before her door, she met Mrs. Templeton, a noble-looking woman with beautiful maternal hands and a broad calm brow above discerning eyes. She told Mahlee that a dispatch had come from Tientsin, stating that Dr. Wang would arrive in the mission between eight and nine that evening. The girl received the tidings without remark.

"Less than an hour now," said the missionary's wife. "It is well, dear, that you are back early so that you can help me prepare a little supper. Dr. Wang will probably be hungry, and since Andrew is away, he will come here to-night." She passed on with some haste.

"Please come to the dining-room as soon as you can," she called back as Mahlee entered her room.

The girl assented; but once alone, she lighted a candle and placing it upon a chest of drawers below a small mirror, began a deliberate scrutiny of her image in the glass. For the first time within a year the placidity of her countenance had been disturbed. The serene blue of her eyes beneath the heavy oval lids was clouded, and those sensitive nostrils of hers which she had tried so hard to get under control, were fluttering, so that in the dilation they showed like rose-petals.

Mahlee looked with alarm at these symptoms. What had happened to her? Was it possible that this insolent Dr. Wang had power so quickly to upset her equilibrium—to render her long-cherished attitude ridiculous?—that attitude which, as she knew, had impressed Andrew Handel to the point of awesome

thanksgiving for the great miracle of grace manifested in her. To reassure herself, she opened one of the drawers of the chest and drew from its depths a letter. It bore the heading C——, Vermont, and was inscribed in a slender perpendicular hand to "Mahlee, the Eurasian, Ark of the Covenant Mission, Peking, China." The girl now held it towards the candle and scanned it curiously. It ran in a series of ecstatic crescendos of praise for "That mighty Act of Redemption and Sanctification wrought in your soul by the Grace of Our Blessed Lord, recently testified unto in an epistle of my dear son Andrew."

When she had read it to the end, Mahlee slowly put the letter back into its envelope. For the first time in her many perusals of it, it had failed to awaken any answering self-satisfaction in her breast. Instead, it now humiliated her strangely. And yet to be more worthy of the admiration expressed in that letter, and of its counterpart so plainly visible in the pale eyes of Andrew Handel whenever they were turned towards her, she had spent months in subduing her unruly members to the utmost rigidity compatible with any movement at all, so that her bones had come at last to seem petrified within her. And in measure as she felt those bones and sinews growing inflexible, she had gloried as at a celestial triumph, coming in moments of special exaltation even to figure herself as, finally, at the Last Judgment, seated on the right hand of the Queen of Heaven in statuesque immobility, unmoved alike by the shrieks of the damned, or the hallelujahs of the redeemed.

Doubtless it was her long line of Buddhist ancestors that had transmitted to Mahlee this singular ideal of holiness—this state of perfection in which the attainer becomes like the idols of silver and gold, those ancient butts for the Psalmist's scorn. "Who have mouths but they-speak not; eyes have they but they see not; they

have ears but they hear not ; noses have they but they smell not ; they have hands but they handle not ; feet have they but they walk not ; neither speak they through their throat." Certainly, up to this hour, some such notion of absolute passivity had appeared to the Eurasian girl as the supreme goal of her spiritual achievement.

But now her confidence in this rigid ideal was shaken. What had Sam Wang done to her that in less than ten minutes in his presence her transcendental vision had begun to dissolve ? In truth, it had needed the touch of ridicule passing over her but ever so lightly to make her suspect that she was after all nothing more than a young inexperienced girl indulging in an absurdly childish pose.

With an abrupt gesture, Mahlee seized the candle and threw its light on the Byzantine Madonna hanging on the wall beside the mirror. *She* had not changed ! There she was, long-eyed, ill-proportioned, with her stiff, methodically ornamented mantle and her preternaturally elongated fingers just as she had left her less than an hour ago. Yet gazing at this strange visage of a past art, Mahlee perceived for the first time that her own imitation had been essentially superficial. For, in spite of the grotesque anatomy, the old Byzantine master had been able to put something rarely good and true into the face of his Virgin, so that she was even beautiful in her way, or showed, at least, a certain pathetic groping towards beauty in the soul of her creator.

As Mahlee gazed at the picture this subtle beauty penetrated her painfully. An odd expression crept into her face, as of a woman just recognising in another a dangerous rival. She flashed the candle-light again on the mirror to compare her own reflection with the painted image. Long and narrow, hooded in her black braids, she wavered in its depths like some spirit of ancient Egypt, released after a five thousand years' bond-

age in sarcophagus and mummy wrappings. Yet she, too, was beautiful—beautiful, aye, and mysterious; she knew it well! But who else was there to recognise her true beauty?

Her heart gave a sudden ugly throb as she remembered the bold admiring eyes of Dr. Wang. There was one! No servile imitating of a Byzantine Virgin would be needed with him; no Christianising of her Pagan charms to please that man!

But the thought brought her no pleasure. She had instead, a strong sense of revolt in knowing that this Sam Wang was of her own peculiar race—that race without a nation, without genealogy, with no past to look back to with pride, nor future to give promise of glory—a race like the Dead Sea with obscure sources and no outlet, destined to lie stagnant throughout the centuries. She felt already that she hated the man because of this shameful consanguinity.

No! her heart was on another quest. Andrew Handel, pale mystic—what of him? A sudden troubled consciousness burned in the girl. To be great in his eyes, as he understood greatness, to subdue him by the cold and lofty beauty of holiness, had not this been the real meaning of her long endeavour after an exotic sanctity? She had told herself that she was expiating her sin towards her dead lover, and to some extent this had been a sincere desire; but had it ever been really her deepest motive?

She recalled an old boast she had once made to Mrs. Templeton soon after beginning her English lessons. "Honourable teacher," she had said, suddenly drawing herself up to her full height and opening wide her heavy lids. "One day I shall be a great *tai-tai* (lady)—a very great *tai-tai*! Remember what I tell you!"

That had been her ambition!—her inalienable birth-right, it had almost seemed, so strongly had it taken possession of her imagination. Now she began to recog-

nise that it was this same old passion for playing the rôle of *grande dame* or *tai-tai*—this time to impress Andrew Handel—which had been at work under the disguise of her Maryolatry.

And she had succeeded! Did not the letter from Vermont testify eloquently to his admiration of her as a "lady rich in holiness." How she had hugged that praise to her bosom and dreamed of still stranger things! Ah, theirs would be no carnal love! A new Dante and a new Beatrice, they would ascend together the rugged steps of asceticism, to rest at last in some windless silent place above all passion and desire. A great *tai-tai*—a very great *tai-tai*—seated in twin majesty with the Queen of Heaven herself, and Andrew Handel there, to adore her through all eternity!

Such had been the strange exalted dream of the Eurasian girl; to realise such mystical ambition had she practised for more than a year her peculiar Virgin-worship. But now her long exaltation was suddenly gone. Sam Wang, and her own mirror, had done this! She turned again and gazed with angry cheated eyes upon the Madonna on the wall. So might jealous Isis have looked at mild Mary of Bethlehem!

VI

DR. WANG was already in the dining-room when Mahlee entered, although she did not see him at once. The room was long and narrow, with a high ceiling of paper and bamboo, and partitions of elaborately carved teak-wood which formed alcoves at both ends. The elegance of this woodwork, and of the old palace walls covered with designs of gilded lacquer, now tarnished to a fine harmony of bronze shades, made a strange background for the nondescript shabbiness of the European furniture—tables, chairs, and cheap side-board—used by the missionaries. A hanging lamp without shade threw out a rather garish light from above the dining-table in the centre of the room. As Mahlee came towards it, Sam Wang and Dr. Templeton stepped out from one of the alcoves where they had been talking. The younger man was dressed in a rough golf suit with a soiled flannel shirt in lieu of linen. Yet he wore his clothes with an air which suggested neither dinginess nor poverty. Rather, they looked on him like the shaggy unclean hide of some big animal. Upon his formal presentation to the girl by Dr. Templeton, the young man bowed with unblinking solemnity. She replied by a slight inclination of the head.

“Dr. Wang has done himself and us much credit,” the missionary said to Mahlee in kindly explanation of this new personality. “In the five years he has been away, he has not only mastered the English language, but has graduated at the head of his class in his medical college in California, so that he is now ready to begin useful work on the mission-field in place of our lamented Dr. Lyon. We are very glad to welcome him back.”

Sam Wang bowed again. "I hope I shall have a chance to redeem my past reputation here," he said. "But I fear that is going to be a hard matter. I know already that I have not been forgotten by some of my old friends."

He glanced at Mahlee with an amused light in his eye. But she gave no sign of understanding his allusion. Dr. Templeton, also, looked blank. The truth is he had totally forgotten any deficiencies in Sam Wang's past conduct; his was indeed a charity which thinketh no evil; now he took the young man's remark as an evidence of humility which augured well for the future.

"The welcome of old friends is always pleasant," he said, "and yours should be especially warm when it is known for what purpose you have come back amongst us."

Mrs. Templeton entered at this moment. "Owing to the lateness of the hour," she explained to Dr. Wang as they sat down at the table, "Mr. and Mrs. Parmelee and our ladies, Dr. Kennedy and Miss Dorn and Miss McGinnis, must postpone their personal greetings until to-morrow. But they all send you a most hearty welcome back to the mission."

Sam Wang smiled a little crookedly and looked at Mahlee. "The dear old Ark of the Covenant!" he exclaimed with unction. "How rejoiced I am to be here!"

A radiant light shone from the deep-set eyes of his host. "We are all rejoiced, my brother," he said with simple emotion, extending his hand across the table and closing it over Wang's with a warm pressure. Mrs. Templeton's smile reflected her husband's delight. But Mahlee, who had caught Dr. Wang's glance, clenched her long hands under the board and remained mute.

"My only regret is that our dear Andrew is at present absent from the mission," Dr. Templeton continued. "He has been off for an eighty days' evangelising tour in Shantung and the neighbouring

provinces. I know that he hoped to be back before your arrival, but his zeal often carries him far."

"Yes, dangerously far in these times of such open anti-foreign sentiment," said his wife, "and, as everybody knows, Shantung is the worst nest of malcontents in China. I shall be uneasy if he does not turn up to-morrow." As she spoke, Mrs. Templeton handed a cup of chocolate to Dr. Wang.

"Shantung, eh?" he queried, as he took it from her hands. There was a sharp note of satisfaction in his tone which sounded little like any echo of regret for the absence of his future colleague. Indeed, he had an air of pleased abstraction as he drained his chocolate at one draught, swallowing at the same time a sandwich which Mahlee passed him. With a look of disgust, but obedient to a nod from her foster-mother, the girl put an entire plateful within his reach.

But his hunger once appeased, Sam Wang showed no inclination to continue toying with his food. Indeed, he evidently regarded eating as an exercise which, although not unpleasant, was yet to be executed with military dispatch and then forgotten. For he now pushed his chair abruptly away from the table.

"Excuse me," he said, grinning at his own devastations. "I eat rapidly and dislike camping about the crumbs. But pray finish, all of you."

Dr. Templeton, who had barely tasted his chocolate, looked slightly surprised; then, exchanging a glance with his wife, whose brow remained unruffled, quietly laid down his own cup, and proposed, since their guest had been refreshed, that they should all adjourn to his study where he had something which might interest the doctor. Sam Wang jumped up promptly and, glancing over his shoulder at Mahlee, offered his arm to Mrs. Templeton with a gallantry in odd contrast with his recent boorishness. The girl frowned with anger as she again caught the laughing impudence of his look. But

she could do nothing but follow, since Dr. Templeton, charmed to imitation of what he mentally noted as the "excellent courtesy" of the doctor, offered his own arm to her. The gesture was not without a quaint awkwardness. Indeed, this tall and gaunt old divine, with his deep-set eyes and grey hair hanging sparse and long over a magnificent forehead, could scarcely be called a genial man. The word has something too mundane in its character to describe the disinterested charity of the missionary. Grave and silent by nature, ordinary speech cost him a visible effort. One was even touched by a certain timidity in him like that of a child desiring, yet scarcely knowing how to please. His strange other-world aspect at such times was penetrated by a poignant charm.

It was with this exquisite shy benignity that he addressed his guest when they were again seated in the study.

"In coming back from your American university I fear you may feel keenly the lack of books and instruments here for your work, although you have, no doubt, brought the most necessary ones with you. Fortunately I have on hand a first-class microscope given to me by an English gentleman who stopped with us a few days some months ago on a trip around the world, and noticed my rather idle habit of picking flowers to pieces and looking at them under a lens. It has just been shipped from London and is quite unnecessarily fine for my purposes. I shall be glad if you will accept it to be utilised towards more practical ends."

He drew a small packing-case from under his study table and asked Mahlee to give it to the doctor.

Sam Wang's eyes snapped with pleasure as he took the box from the girl's reluctant hands. He had long coveted a microscope and now accepted his host's gift without the least hesitation.

"Thank you," he said. "I can make use of it."

The missionary was gratified. He went on to offer the young man the use of his library, in which, he explained, with a smile, Dr. Wang would find, if not the very latest scientific literature, at least, the famous "Anatomy of Melancholy" standing in "sober state" as on Lamb's own shelves.

Sam Wang accepted this offer as he had done the first, promptly and as a matter of course. He liked to read, he said, and often wanted other books besides medical treatises. Even the "Anatomy of Melancholy," he agreed, might prove exhilarating after Gray's. He asked Mahlee if she had read "Trilby," which had "recently made such a hit in Europe and America." The girl replied that she had never heard of it, whereupon Sam Wang laughed.

"What am I thinking about! I ought to remember that we're in China. 'The Romance of the Three Kingdoms' with its triple heroes and seven-hundred personages should be about the latest thing here in fiction. What volume are you in now, may I ask?"

Mahlee looked annoyed, and Mrs. Templeton seeing her displeasure answered for her.

"Mahlee has given up reading novels, whether Chinese or English. She thinks she has better ways of employing her time." The missionary's wife smiled her approval at this sacrifice of pleasure to duty.

But the line of annoyance deepened in the girl's brow. She felt with resentment that Dr. Wang was secretly enjoying himself at her expense.

Fortunately, Dr. Templeton, seeing the girl's embarrassment, hastened to resume the conversation.

"The author of the original 'Record of the Three Kingdoms,'" he said, "was a noted scholar named Ch'en Shou, born 233 A.D., although the present Romance, founded on historical facts which occurred sixteen and a half centuries ago, owes its form and the position it occupies in Chinese estimation to a great genius, Ch'in-

Shing-t'an, born in 1627, at the close of the Ming dynasty. But," he broke off, noting a peculiar expression on Sam Wang's face, "I am probably giving you facts with which you are already perfectly familiar."

"I ought to be familiar with them," the young man answered seriously, "since, in spite of my fun-making, they pertain to the most deservedly popular work of fiction in my own literature over which I pored for hours as a boy. Why!" he cried, turning to Mahlee and suddenly waxing boyishly enthusiastic. "Anyone not like Hsia-hou-tun, one of the seven hundred personages who swallowed his own eyes, must see what a great book that is! Do you remember Chang-fei, second of the three warriors? I think I have the description by heart." He broke off into Chinese. "He had the head and round eyes of a panther, a mouth like a swallow's bill and bristles like a tiger. His voice was like the rumbling of thunder and his strength like that of a race-horse."

Mahlee, recovered from her confusion, smiled disdainfully. But the young man, transported by his own appreciation, did not notice her scorn.

"And the still more doughty Kwan-Yun Ch'ang, now worshipped as Kwan-ti, the war-god," he continued, taking on in spite of his beardless state a strange resemblance to the savage Mongolian hero as he again recited from the original in a deep sonorous voice:

"He stood nine feet three inches high and had a beard two feet long. His face was brown like dates, his lips were like cinnabar, his eyes, the eyes of the red phenix, and his bushy brows seemed to invite silk worms to nestle there. Stern and lofty was his countenance, and his bearing awful and menacing."

"Bravo!" cried Mrs. Templeton, although inwardly shuddering at the aspect of cruel power that Sam Wang's face had assumed during the recital. He seemed, indeed, like the war-god, Kwan-ti, whose

hideous effigy terrorises native children when they are first taken to the temple to worship. "Can this man truly be a Christian who looks so much like the most fierce of the heathen divinities?" the good lady asked herself, and was immediately ashamed of her doubt as she saw the look of hearty approval in her husband's eyes. He, incapable of imputing evil to anyone, praised Dr. Wang's fine memory for the Chinese classics.

"It will stand you in good stead in your missionary labours," he said. "A man possessed alike of Oriental culture and Western science is rare, and cannot fail to impress the Chinese with the truth of any message he may present. I envy the power I foresee in you to win souls for the Master." He ended almost wistfully. Sam Wang's uncouth mouth twitched as if he had listened to some delicate witticism.

Mahlee alone had no commendation for the young man. "And you are proud to call that your literature?" she cried as he looked to her after the others had spoken. There was an eager contempt in the question which nettled Sam Wang.

"Certainly," he answered, proudly. "And what pray, do *you* count as *yours*?" He stressed the pronouns almost insolently.

The girl's strange golden skin brightened as if touched by some inward flame.

"The English literature is mine," she replied, haughtily—"Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton—I care nothing for Chinese books."

With these words, she excused herself and went back to her room, where, without lighting a candle, she immediately undressed. Then, after saying her prayers, she crept in between the icy sheets of her bed, taking even more than her usual care—almost as if in defiance of some unseen person—to compose her limbs to the utmost rigidity possible, with hands folded above her breast, like an effigy on an old tomb.

VII

BUT notwithstanding the decent composure of her body, Mahlee's thoughts were far from calm. Why, after all, had she repudiated those old books which she secretly knew had once interested her profoundly—the genius of which, indeed, seemed in some hours far more akin to her nature than anything she had ever read in English. In them was mirrored all that early life of hers—that strange old Chinese life in the coffin-yard which seemed to be already receding indefinitely from her. The legends of gods and heroes, the quaint allegories, the thousand curious alchemistic receipts with their *Yin* and *Yang*, those mysterious dual forces controlling the elements of nature symbolised by the “tiger” and “dragon,” all the stupefying demonology and geomancy of her Oriental ancestors, as well as their rich proverbial wisdom, which she had found in the ancient tomes, had indeed seemed to her in the reading like twice-told tales. For had she not long ago known their perfect epitome in Madame Ling, that terrible old grandmother of hers, now guarded in death between two blood-red dragons?

Yes, she understood the Chinese writers well,—far better, in truth, notwithstanding her boast, than she had ever comprehended Chaucer or Shakespeare or Milton. But she resolved to read no more of them, to understand them no longer. Since he—this other Eurasian whom she hated—was evidently more the son of his Chinese mother than of his European father, she determined passionately to prove the opposite truth in herself. She would henceforth be wholly the child of the “foreign mandarin” as Madame Ling had always called her

father. She would break the chain which kept her down to her obscure Mongolian levels. She would completely emancipate herself from the bondage of the past. . . .

A servant went down through the hall carrying a lighted lamp. Mahlee, staring upward in the dark, saw the streak of light through the chink of the door fall athwart a small wooden tablet standing on a table as on an altar. It was the memorial which almost five years ago, in spite of her profession of Christianity, the girl had believed it her duty to erect to the memory of her grandmother. She had had the Ya-bah inscribe upon it, in matchless golden ideographs, the name of Madame Ling and her age—"the very honourable age of eighty-one years and six moons." And for almost four years after her baptism, Mahlee had worshipped the tablet in secret every night conjointly with the new Christian God. Mrs. Templeton, who knew of the girl's practice, had smiled in wise fashion and had in no way tried to interfere. It was only since the substitution of her Maryology that Mahlee had ceased of her own accord.

But now, at sight of the tablet suddenly illumined, a thrill of superstition ran through her. The great Doctrine of Filial Piety, that stupendous moral force represented in China by ancestor worship, leapt into life in the girl. So irresistible was it, that before the light was gone, Mahlee had sprung from her bed and was kowtowing before the tablet.

"Granddame! Granddame!" she cried. "Once I would have given my feet for you. *Now would you have my soul?*"

She remained there prostrated for more than an hour after the servant had passed with the lamp, possessed by an indefinable anguish, the obscure battle of bloods hot and heavy within her. Visions of her unknown father and her equally unknown mother visited her. Sometimes the former appeared like a devil, the generic title bestowed by native superstition on all foreigners, but

now personalised in her fevered fancy as a real demon in swift and ruthless pursuit of that wan little shadow which she had once seen flitting up and down the long River of Souls. Again, he was a god, Jove-like in majesty, impersonal, removed, inaccessible either to the love or reproach of mortals like herself; and then her mother would seem like an Oriental Clytie or Oreithyia, whom for a moment the God had deigned to visit.

Or, he became a great general, with military pomp and prowess in his bearing; or a statesman, astute and crafty; or, again, he appeared to her as a rich and insolent city merchant, whereupon the face of her mother took on the abject look of an overworked scullion-maid. Always she saw him as rich, powerful, and arrogant, and her mother, the poor little Yueh Woa—"Moon beautiful"—as Madame Ling used to call her, trembling, fading, and self-effacing before him—the merest dim wraith of a moon!

The battle within her seemed, in reality, but the duel between these two, the duel between them over herself, their child. Strangely enough, though, it did not seem an unequal contest, for all her father's power and for all her mother's feebleness. For behind each one was arrayed a whole dim host of folk—dead, she knew, yet invested with a strange authority over the destiny of her life. Her Ancestors!—Asiatic and European, from whose loins she had sprung, who had had an equal share in her making. Now, silently, in terrifying pale phalanx they drew up in rank after rank on either hand behind her parents. There, with dead eyes, they gazed at her, and with dead fingers they pointed, on the one hand, to the setting, and on the other to the rising, sun. . . . As far as the East is from the West—so they were beckoning her! And the force of their opposing gestures seemed to rend her soul asunder.

Those behind her father were bold and powerful-looking. English lords and ladies they seemed, as she

had read of them in novels, with the strong proud faces and the imperious gestures of those born to command. Many of the men were encased in steel from head to foot, with plumes waving gallantly from their helmets, and drawn swords in their hands; while their ladies went silk-clad, with splendid white bosoms half bare, and snowy arms flashing with gems and gold. Behind these, she saw Saxon Kings and Thanes, with Knights of the Round Table, and pushing on in the rear, fierce border chieftains, "wolf-like men worse than the wolves. . . . Reddening the sun with smoke and earth with blood." And still more dimly discerned, loomed the savage forms of old Teutonic Vikings, and Druid priests carrying branches of the sacred oak from the primeval forests of Britain. But there, in an impenetrable jungle of wet woods and marshes over-run with wild beasts, her father's line suddenly became lost to her sight.

Far less brilliant, but immeasurably longer, was the file behind her mother. Ah, the unendurable opportunity of those countless yellow faces gazing at her!—the patient and toil-worn hosts of them, who, bent-backed, without hope, without memory, beat out the nails for the coffins of their generation, and then sank without a murmur into their own. Directly behind the shadowy form of her mother, she saw Madame Ling as on the day of the coffin-fitting, scarred and blackened by time to the semblance of a burnt-out cinder, yet with all the cunning of a fox in her old eyes. The cunning of a fox—yes!—but the endless patience, too, of the Chinese peasant, which all the craft and guile of ages cannot quite rob of its dignity, nor the most grotesque superstition spoil of its invincible pathos.

"Girl, will you always be a cat treading on my heart?" She seemed again to hear the burnt lips speak, and those dim generations behind, reaching back through measureless antiquity beyond the days of

Abraham and Noah, took up the words in a long echoing wail :

"Girl, will you be a cat treading on our hearts?"

With a cry, Mahlee sprang up from her knees and stumbled in the dark to her bed. She buried her head in the sheets to shut out the look of those dead eyes, of those countless yellow faces—the sound of that long echoing wail. But as she became quieter she had a presage of some larger meaning in her vision, going far beyond herself to that final coming battle of the races for world supremacy. Who was destined to win in that contest? Would it be certainly those of the strong proud faces, the self-styled "world-conquerors," using slaves of steel and iron and steam to keep up their costly state? Would it be, indeed, without peradventure of doubt, the Occident with its factitious, top-heavy, over-complex, social machinery, that could hope for victory on that day? Might not it conceivably be, rather, that in this last terrific duel the dominion should fall, not to her father's, but to her mother's race, and those kindred to it, to the so-called feeblers, rice-eating peoples on the vast plains of Asia? Surely if abundant fertility in reproduction with the unlimited capacity of self-denial and almost unimaginable patience, count for anything with nature, it might well seem that that great Dame herself had already taken sides with the East against the West!

A vague premonition of some stupendous disaster possessed the girl. She shuddered in inward revolt, and falling asleep at last, dreamed that she was a cat treading on a million hearts!

VIII

SAM WANG, lying heavily in the guest bed on the other side of the hall from Mahlee, was not visited by his ancestors nor troubled by fears of catastrophe. In fact, had his night been disturbed by any such vision of calamity overtaking the Western nations, he would have greeted it with exultation, followed by the prayer that he should himself become an agent in its speedy realisation. For he had frankly thrown in his lot with his mother's race without reservation or any looking backward.

The man's antecedents were obscure enough. It was rumoured that his father was a British sea captain, a bad and daring character, who, turned river-pirate, had robbed the Imperial junks plying the Yangtsikiang. But all that seemed really certain was that Sam had been found as a child of four or five wandering about the "bund" or quay at Shanghai. Unable to give any account of himself, except that he was hungry, that his name was Sam Wang, and that his "mother had gone off in a junk," he had been placed in a "Home" for Eurasian children, where he had remained until his twelfth or thirteenth year, wearing an ugly brown serge uniform and learning heterogeneous facts of life from his companions who, for the most part, had never seen their fathers, and whose mothers had apparently "gone off in a junk" in company with his own. Then to make room for others in the over-crowded "Home," a number of boys had been sent to Peking and distributed among the mission schools for Chinese lads in that city. It was thus that Sam Wang and two of his Shanghai cronies, Sing and Chung, came to the Ark of the

Covenant Mission, where they at once became famous as the Devil's own Triplets. Strongest and most daring of the trio was Sam Wang himself, whose conduct was not only outrageously lawless, but often marked by fierce insolence towards his benefactors. But thanks to the influence of Dr. Templeton, his outbreaks had been excused again and again, and he had been allowed to finish his course. Then he had gone over the seas to study medicine, and now, after five years in the land of the foreigners, he was again in the mission, come back, as Huang-ma had said with sarcastic emphasis, to "cure the sick and expound the Gesu-words." But as the old crone surmised, Sam Wang's real purposes were somewhat less godly.

Already decided as to what camp he should follow before he went to America, his five years in that country had only strengthened the hostility he had always felt for the white race in spite of the abundant favours he had received all his life from the missionaries. Ugly and brutal, yet with an astonishing lucidity and directness of intelligence, the Eurasian had been both feared and scorned by his classmates in the medical college in California where he had studied. He had the prodigious Chinese memory, which never played him false in the acquiring and retention of scientific data, and with it, the rarer capacity for original research. And his execution in surgery was from the beginning amazingly rapid and accurate. One reason for this skill was doubtless his life-long practice of sleight-of-hand, learned as a young lad in Shanghai from a Chinese juggler at the cost of half a taow (five cents) a lesson. The boy had obtained the necessary money by pawning his undergarments provided for him semi-annually by the "Home," and had spent it thus to win the admiration of his comrades, who regarded him as a veritable miracle-worker. How easy to go shirtless if by doing so one might learn the trick of swallowing a sword

without choking! Now his trained and powerful hands played over human flesh and sinew with magical swiftness and surety, making of the surgeon's art a true jugglery amazing to those who beheld it.

But his aggressive manners, and his constantly reiterated boast that he was a thorough Chinese in his sympathies (although his mixture of race was generally known), were hardly calculated to make him beloved in a state which was first to forbid Chinese immigration, and where the Oriental question is ever hotly agitated. It was not strange that Sam Wang soon made himself a conspicuous target for the oblique shafts of this animosity among the young Americans who studied with him, although not even the boldest of them had ever dared to attack him openly. Formidable enough, certainly, was his scowl, with the drawing together of brows as bushy as those of Kwan-Yun Ch'ang "which seemed to invite silk-worms to nestle there," and an under-glowering of eyes, small, divergent, and coal black, "with the light of hell-pits in them," as one testified who had come off worsted in an altercation with the redoubtable Eurasian.

Yet in spite of the outward respect which he took care to inspire, the young man had suffered more than might be supposed from this under current of hostility. For he had the sensitiveness of the young and strong who feel themselves unjustly handicapped by an inferior social or racial position—a sensitiveness which easily turns into resentment, and from resentment, almost inevitably into violence.

So it was with a soul full of rankling bitterness that Dr. Sam Wang at the end of his course had set sail for the Middle Kingdom, now definitely adopted by him, if not in strict parlance as his "fatherland," at least as his homeland. In coming back he had but one well-defined ambition. By the help of God or the Devil, he would banish every foreigner from China.

With this holy motive in heart, and desiring to obtain a base for operations, he presented himself by letter to a certain Board of Foreign Missions in the city of New York as candidate for the position of medical missionary at the Ark of the Covenant Mission in Peking. Being piously worded, if not so conceived, the young man's letter won for him a prompt acceptance; and he was sent out to the field in this spring of 1899 when, as has been seen, Mahlee's sanctity was in its full flower.

It was at the thought of this sanctity, or rather of how he had troubled it, that Sam Wang now laughed in his bed as he had laughed before that evening. It tickled his fancy to see in his "bride-elect," as he already mentally designated Mahlee, a model of piety, although he was no less pleased to feel the beginning of its quick disintegration under the light keen touch of his ridicule. Here was surgery to his taste! Better than the cutting into flesh and sinew was this swift incision into the complex tissue of a girl's soul. Delicate tenuous fabric wounded by a pin-prick, yet withal amazingly resistant!

The man's big heart began to throb with the delight which he had always experienced on the eve of some especially difficult operation. He would have her, if he had to cut her soul in two and send one-half after the foreigners whom he had vowed to banish from China!

Yet to do him justice, even for such savage vivisection as this Sam Wang believed he had the needful balm. Deeply impregnated with Oriental fatalism—the only religion he possessed—he had instantly at sight of the Eurasian girl persuaded himself that destiny had appointed him to be her rightful master. So that considering merely Mahlee's own happiness, the quicker her submission to him the speedier would be her cure. And as he thought of that final submission of which he

had never a moment's doubt, the realisation of the girl's present propinquity stole in upon his senses with almost unendurable fierceness. It was several hours before he slept.

IX

THE following morning after breakfast the missionaries came in a body to greet their new colleague. "We are the committee of welcome," Mr. and Mrs. Parmelee explained smilingly. It was natural for these two to conduct all the activities of life through "Committees." Mr. Parmelee was a brisk man of athletic build who invariably dressed even in the pulpit in an American business suit. His wife, a pretty blonde, wore her hair in a becoming pompadour and was always seen in a neat tailored "shirt waist" and skirt. Their interest in salvation was so to speak a wholesale interest; one felt that they would have enjoyed "cornering the market" in souls.

"Yes, welcome to our returned truant!" a rich voice echoed behind them. It belonged to Dr. Eliza Kennedy, a big-boned, deep-chested woman of middle age, strong-looking as a man, with curly grey hair cut short over a large head. Leaning on her arm was Miss Claribel McGinnis, a dimpled smiling creature of twenty-two or three, with little fat gesticulating hands and a bust as round as the breast of a pouter pigeon. She taught in the kindergarten department of the mission school and looked like her plump Chinese babies. Dr. Kennedy, who doted on her, used to say that it was lucky Claribel had not chosen a cannibal island as the scene of her missionary labours, as any savage with a sweet tooth would have found her irresistible.

It is possible that her co-worker, Miss Rebecca Dorn, a woman in her late thirties, who followed them, might have escaped such a fate in like circumstances; for although thoroughly devout, she was little suggestive

of anything sweet or succulent. She had a small head triangular in shape, like that of a reptile, which was constantly jerked backward and forward on its neck in the spasmodic movement of St. Vitus' dance. The Chinese school girls called her the "lizard." Her mania was absolute correctness of pronunciation.

Mrs. Templeton met the company at the door, and said with a smile that Dr. Wang was not up yet, but that she would send a servant to beg him to appear as soon as possible. She asked the friends to wait for him in the "parlour."

Marlee had been playing on a small organ at the end of the room, but closed it as soon as the missionaries entered. Indeed, she could never be induced to play before others. Andrew Handel, who was a fine musician, had given her lessons for several years in European music; but left to herself, the girl had fallen to improvising weird incomprehensible strains in minor key, and would now play nothing else. She complained that other music hurt her.

Claribel McGinnis went up to her eagerly and began to ply her with questions about the new doctor. Was he tall? Was he handsome? Had he an air of good breeding and distinction? She secretly hoped that the report that he was Eurasian might prove a mistake. She was unwilling to believe it, although the name Wang certainly suggested Chinese blood.

Mahlee replied with the listless indifference which a young Egyptian princess might have shown in discussing a slave newly arrived from Ethiopia. She had not noticed any of his "points," and could give Miss McGinnis no information whatsoever.

The girl was dressed with even more severity than usual in a dark grey gown which fell narrowly about her. Her head, with its curious black coiffure, emerged from the grey material like a fine piece of gold and ebony. She alone seemed in harmony with the dark coppery

walls of the splendid old room which had once served as antechamber to the defunct mandarin, and where the present gathering of missionaries appeared fantastically incongruous. And certainly she formed likewise a most vivid note of contrast to that company. It was remarkable that, with the exception of her foster mother and Dr. Kennedy, the missionaries all seemed a little in awe of Mahlee.

In her presence, Mr. Parmelee lost his brisk business manner and pulled his hands from his pockets, where otherwise he was wont to store them when not in use. His wife invariably addressed the girl in her most formal society tone; although afterwards she would say to her husband familiarly enough that she just longed to see Mahlee in a nice "up-to-date" tailor-made suit instead of those queer mediæval drapes which she affected. "She really has heaps of style, you know, if somebody would only tell her how to dress and give her a few Delsarte lessons to limber up her joints a bit."

Miss Dorn seldom spoke to Mahlee at all, and when she did betrayed her nervousness by a more than usually exaggerated exhibition of St. Vitus' dance.

Miss McGinnis, equally ill at ease, smiled incessantly whenever she talked with the Eurasian, but always confided afterwards to Dr. Eliza that somehow—she did not quite know why—she thought she could never make Mahlee her "intimate friend." "I suppose she is awfully good, but she is just too uncanny!" was her awed comment, at which Dr. Kennedy would pat her pretty Claribel on the head and say: "Certainly, dearie, you are far more wholesome!"

In truth, Dr. Kennedy, like Mrs. Templeton, gravely mistrusted Mahlee's religious fanaticism. She prescribed cold baths and vigorous dumb-bell exercise, and tried to joke the girl out of her sanctimoniousness by calling her "My little saint" before everybody in the

weekly mission meeting. Mahlee would lift her eyelids a little at this, but invariably answer the doctor with grave courtesy, while Andrew Handel, approving her manner of rebuke to the older woman's familiarity, followed her with pale admiring eyes. Even Dr. Templeton, humble before another's piety, mingled with his paternal gentleness towards the girl a touch of homage.

As for Mahlee herself, the docility which she showed at the time of her first contact with the foreigners had long since been modified. And although she yearned more than ever this morning, after the night's strange visions, to identify herself completely with her father's race, she understood now that it was not the missionaries who could instruct her in her real heritage. She felt that her father and his people must differ vastly from these good and pious folk ; and in her innermost heart she began to have some undefined contempt for their goodness as for something too akin to servility. No ! her father was not of this mild Christian stripe. She knew it by those hot strong forces of her own nature inherited from him. On that day her daughterhood was eagerly recognising its allegiance. Again the duel was on ; her own spirit strove on the side of her father.

She noticed that morning, though not for the first time, the half awed respect which she inspired in the missionaries. Was it really because they thought her a saint, or was it the involuntary tribute they paid to her air of *grande dame* ? She took it, in any case, as her right. By some paradox she felt herself better born than these. In this high mood only the fastidious Andrew Handel seemed to approach her in equality.

If, indeed, she had made a cult of meekness in her mingled remorse for the Ya-bah's death, and her unconscious passion for the young ascetic who had commended to her the lowly Virgin as spiritual model,

what infinite pains had it cost her ! How hardly had she tamed by a thousand curbings the wild blood which leapt within her, until it seemed at times in danger of breaking through her veins and gushing forth like a cataract long pent up.

And in spite of her utmost efforts, last night her own mirror had cried Hypocrite upon her ; one touch of ridicule from a stranger had torn her sanctity to shreds and changed her Virgin worship to a fierce mystical rivalry. She now waited breathless for the return of Andrew Handel. His face was defined before her : high pallid brow shaded by ash-blond hair ; eyes pale as opals, yet with the same fluctuating fire in them, —cold stones with hearts aflame ! And lips drawn fine as a thread of silk, but red—ah, how red !

Mahlee quivered with a new emotion. “Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet,” she murmured inaudibly.

Truly the young divine would, on his return, have occasion to note a second interesting “metempsychosis.” She had determined to fascinate him still, though this time with other charms than the wan beauty of holiness. Mahlee had by now consciously pitted herself against the Queen of Heaven !

But she still clung to her severe dress and maintained her archaic stiffness, half-consciously realising that to abandon her long pose too soon would be an admission of Sam Wang’s power. If he had brought her to sudden self-knowledge, it had been by humiliating her keenly. Here, indeed, was one whom she could not awe either in her rôle of great saint or grand lady !

“Sam Wang, Eurasian like yourself !” She shrank again at the remembrance of his outstretched hand, and knew that she could hope for no mercy from his sense of that revolting equality between them. Yet she would escape from it ! Her long religious exaltation, in falling from her, had laid bare, first, her ambition, and then her human need. In one way only could she

throw off the bondage of her mother's race. In one way only could she be happy. She knew now that she loved not as a saint, but as a woman. She must marry Andrew Handel !

X

DR. TEMPLETON came in from his study, where he was translating the Book of Job into the Wen-li, to greet the missionaries.

"Dr. Wang is weary from his journey and so has protracted his rest; but doubtless he will appear in a few moments," he said as he entered. "Ah, we are all here save Andrew. Our new brother will be gratified by this welcome."

There began a general conversation in which the missionaries spoke with anxiety of Andrew Handel. It appeared that he had intended to pass through I Chou Fu and Yen Chou Fu, centres of two prefectures in Shantung, said to be the birthplace of the dangerous sect known as the I Ho Ch'uan, literally, "Fists of Righteous Harmony," also called the Great Sword Society, which had for its avowed object the extermination of every foreigner in China.

They knew Handel meant to go to the northern part of the province of Kiangsu, south of Shantung, where, in this spring of 1899, famine was so extreme that reports told of starving people who were selling their children for prices ranging from fifty to a thousand *cash*. But no letter or message had been received from the young man himself since his departure more than two months ago; and now came rumours that this whole territory, including not only Kiangsu but the contiguous parts of Shantung and Anhui, was in a ferment, with robber bands roaming at will over the country and political intrigue at its height. In this region of famine and rebellion, the popular hatred of the "foreign devil" manifested all over China by a half century of

anti-foreign riots and virulent anti-foreign propaganda—outbreaks which followed each new territorial and commercial intrusion—was now of a potency which augured illimitable mischief for the future. Here the Great Sword Society with its watchword *Mieh Yang*, "Exterminate Foreigner," had already organised encampments in many counties where quantities of swords were being made, and where language highly threatening to all foreigners was the order of the day.

It was the fear of these fanatics, already coming to be spoken of as "Boxers," which caused the missionaries to tremble for the safety of their absent colleague.

"Andrew is probably trying to convert the Great Sword Society into a Young Men's Christian Association, and won't come home before he has got them all to join," said Dr. Kennedy, attempting a facetiousness which he was far from feeling.

"Yes, no doubt that would just appeal to him as his conscientious duty," agreed Mrs. Templeton, but she scarcely smiled as she spoke.

Indeed the missionaries were looking at each other very gravely, when Mr. Parmelee abruptly announced his intention of heading a small search-party on the morrow. "If he is not here within twenty-four hours, I shall take Li and Hsien and follow him up."

Mahlee, who had been listening intently, gave an involuntary gasp of relief. But Mrs. Parmelee turned pale; then obeying some strong effort of her will, smiled. Her voice trembled.

"You will need to take plenty of warm clothes for the journey, Morris."

"Yes, Minnie," he answered in a tone of the tenderest reassurance.

"I shall go with you, Morris," Dr. Templeton said quietly. But at this there was a chorus of protests from all save his wife, who, like Mrs. Parmelee, first turned pale and then forced herself to smile assent.

"No, you shall not go a step with that cold on your chest," said Dr. Kennedy, at which Mrs. Templeton suddenly looked ten years younger and beamed upon the doctor. Mr. Parmelee also firmly opposed the idea, so that in the end the old scholar himself reluctantly abandoned it.

"If any one accompanies me, it should be Dr. Wang," said the younger man; and then, drawing out his watch, made a gesture of impatience. "Ten o'clock! we've been waiting here more than an hour, and I should have been at the boys' school early this morning. What is keeping the doctor?"

"I do not know," answered Mrs. Templeton, ashamed for her guest's tardiness. "I will send the boy again to his room." She arose to call the servant.

"It isn't worth while," said Mahlee quietly. "Dr. Wang left the compound three-quarters of an hour ago."

"Left the compound!" cried everybody.

"Yes," said the girl, languidly. "I saw him pass through the court."

"Gone! and we've been waiting here to welcome him! Mahlee, why didn't you tell us?" exclaimed Miss McGinnis in a tone of almost tragic disappointment and reproach, while Miss Dorn's face twitched with indignation. But Dr. Kennedy burst into a melodious laugh.

"Oh, the scamp," she cried, delightedly.

"Scamp!" echoed her little friend, ready to cry. "I should call him a plain pig!"

"And I should agree with you," said Mrs. Parmelee, drawing on her gloves. "Come, Morris, let us go!"

"Certainly," replied her husband with the same intonation of polite disgust.

The committee of welcome disbanded.

"I am very sorry for this," said Dr. Templeton, looking almost guilty and exceedingly shy as he followed

the missionaries to the door. "Dr. Wang could not have understood, but he will doubtless be home for luncheon," he added, with unconscious irony, "and I am sure will be glad to see you then."

"Yes, do come back all of you. I am certain it is some mistake," said the wife. But she, too, appeared greatly chagrined.

Mahlee, alone, stood silent behind her foster mother with an odd smile on her lips. Through the open door she had caught a glimpse of Sam Wang, hidden behind a lilac bush in a corner of the court.

XI

"At last! I thought those confounded welcomers would never go!" The tone was the aggrieved one of a man whose patience has been tried to the extreme limit of endurance.

Dr. Templeton had gone back to his Wen-li, and his wife to her morning catechism class for Chinese women. Mahlee, in the act of reseating herself at the organ, did not turn immediately at the voice. Instead she pushed in with deliberation some stops which had been left open; then, closing the keyboard once more, wheeled slowly around on her stool. Before she had fully faced him, she was conscious of Sam Wang's bold eyes fixed upon her, almost pinning her, as if with some teasing intention understood by those who delight to transfix insects with a needle.

Her anger burnished her cheeks to a brighter gold as she rose to her feet and lifted her own eyes defiantly to meet his. But to her surprise, as they gazed so at each other, the laughing impudence of his expression vanished; it gave place first to admiration, then to some still softer emotion.

"By God! Mahlee," he broke out at last. "Don't look at me like that. I mean you no harm, girl. I've simply come to share your isolation."

The last words were so extraordinary that she flushed again.

"Isolation! What makes you think I am isolated?" she asked sharply.

"Because your case is my own. For the Chinese we lack the barbarous distinction of being genuine 'foreign devils,' yet are too much tainted with demon blood to

pass as respectable natives ; while for the foreigners we are objects of secret scorn, or what is worse, of open pity, as being ' neither fish, flesh, fowl, nor good red herring ' as the saying goes."

Her anger flashed. "That is not true!" she exclaimed. "No one dares show me either pity or scorn."

"Ah?"

His tone was such an irritating mingling of both those sentiments that to keep herself from further retort she relapsed into silence. Sam Wang commenced to pace the room, and Mahlee dropped again on the organ stool. In spite of herself she began miserably to ask if Wang were not right—if beneath the respect which the missionaries showed her there were not a substratum of scorn or pity. Andrew Handel! His pity! She imagined it. And it was so poisonous that she thrust it aside vehemently. That could not be! He was too great; his vision too spiritual for that. If he had failed to love her hitherto, it was because he had held her too high, and not too low: "a lady rich in holiness," he had said of her. But now it would be her sweet delight to show him that after all she was human. Without causing him too great a shock, she counted on gradually turning his adoration into love.

She looked at Sam Wang, as he turned towards her, with a smile of self-imposed confidence on her lips. At sight of it he halted abruptly; he seemed to read her thoughts and at once to resent and defy them. His thick guttural voice vibrated.

"One day," he said, as if the conversation had not been interrupted. "You will realise the truth of what I have told you and then——"

"Then?" she echoed contemptuously.

"Then"—his tone was almost a threat—"you will marry me."

He made no gesture towards her, but as he spoke his

enormous yellow face became suddenly suffused with blood and she could see the veins on his massive neck dilate.

She stood for a moment as if she had not heard his words; then a shudder of sheer disgust went through and through her like a spasm. *Marry him!* It would be like joining herself to a Caliban, to that lower Mongolian blood of hers which she would secretly have given all her hopes of eternal life to have emptied out of her veins so that not a drop remained to contaminate her. She drew an arm back in a gesture of abhorrence.

At sight of it the colour receded from his face as suddenly as it had mounted, leaving his flesh like cold clay.

"Oh!" he cried, "My lady-saint thinks herself too good for me, does she? And who may your father be, I pray, that you should give yourself such airs of fine breeding?"

"My father is a gentleman, a foreign mandarin!" Mahlee flashed out involuntarily.

An extraordinary look came into Sam Wang's face.

"A gentleman! a foreign mandarin!" he drawled back in savage mockery. "A fine English gentleman, who employs his noble leisure in disseminating offspring in the slums of Oriental cities; who brings proud-hearted daughters into the world to live in Chinese coffin-shops! Well," he ended, looking at her with curious conviction almost more insulting than incredulous, "I believe you. May I inquire the honourable name and title of your sire?"

The simplicity of her answer astonished him.

"I do not know them," she said. No boasts or protestations would have so instantly established her real superiority.

Sam Wang's tone of fierce banter fell from him. He took a step backward as if to correct his late

insolence by maintaining the distance which he knew she desired.

"Kuniang," he said with rude sincerity, "I have no wish to insult you. No doubt I have spoken too soon but what I have said I mean. Your father may be a prince for all that I know or care. Mine I believe, was a river-pirate—a rather more honourable profession than 'gentleman,' I take it; but on that point, we will not quibble. Whatever our fathers have been or are, nothing is more certain than that we ourselves are Eurasian and what the world terms bastards."

The girl shrank as if her flesh had been cut, but remained mute.

Sam Wang, himself, felt that this was heavy surgery, and that it would be wise to proceed with more care.

"We are all victims of heredity, implacable heredity," he continued, assuming the tone of the man of science who speaks from the impersonal point of view, "and in our case heredity takes the form of an inward hostility of alien bloods which refuse to mingle in our veins. It is as if the great Chemist had been trying new combinations and had not quite hit it. Our formula is somehow wrong. We are neither European nor Asiatic, nor are we properly speaking their sum. Rather we are each in turn battling fiercely against the other. Or, to change the figure, as some one has said: Between the Occidental and the Oriental mind there is a great gulf fixed. Well, that gulf, that unbridgeable abyss, is in us dividing these two natures for ever.

In spite of herself, Mahlee bent towards him. "Do you also feel that?" she asked curiously.

"Feel it!" he cried with bitterness. "Have I ever felt anything else? Don't you suppose that I, too, often despise the Mongolian in me—treat him like a slave, a coolie, a dog of a Chinaman? But I won't

stand anybody else insulting him, for in my heart I know he's the better man of the two."

"Of the two?"

"Yes, the two that are in me—the sons of my father and of my mother; those quarrelsome twins who together are called Sam Wang. Sam of course,"—he gave a contemptuous wave of the hand—"is the arrogant one of the pair, the conceited, talkative, emotional European; he has more wit, more of the flashy show-stuff, than the other; but Wang is the real man."

"And what is Wang?"

At the question the big man straightened himself as at some challenge; his eyes lighted and his ugly face was touched by an indescribable dignity. Mahlee who listened, felt that her maternal ancestors represented by that immeasurable line of dead yellow faces seen in her vision had found a voice.

"Wang," he said slowly, "is the Chinese peasant. His home, named after him, is known as the 'Village of Wang of the Iron Mouth,' somewhere between the 'Great Melon Hamlet' and the 'Duck's Nest of the Chou family' on the banks of the Hoang-ho or the Yangtsikiang. Here, in a little adobe hut with earthen floor and smoke-blackened walls hung with rude plough-share and pruning hook, he has lived with his wife and his children, his pigs and his asses, since the dawn of history, in a struggle for existence silent but inconceivably intense. For in a country where a square mile must nourish from one to two thousand persons, even slight variations of weather often cause devastating famines or floods, and in either case it means death to hundreds of thousands."

"And how has Wang escaped—survived?" asked Mahlee, now listening intently.

"By luck and the absence of nerves," replied Sam Wang, warming to his subject and falling into sonorous periods. "Ages ago he perceived that his nerves would

be in his way, and stripped them from him as a runner does his clothing. So when the rains descended and the floods came, Wang and his wife were always found ready. With their children strapped to their backs, their plough-share and cooking pots trundled in a wheelbarrow, their pigs and their asses driven before them at the point of a stick, they fled again and again from disaster. But when the calamity had passed, they invariably came back to live and worship beside the graves of their ancestors."

"Their ancestors! Yes, yes, I understand that!" Mahlee's voice had lost its hostility; a strange light glowed in her eyes. "They could never abandon those graves."

"No, and what's more, they never *shall* abandon them," cried Sam Wang with sudden energy. "Until Doomsday itself—up to the last generation of men—the world will see Wang rising early and toiling late on his little fields of rice and millet, by the graves of his forefathers. For he has been truly characterised as the 'tireless, all pervading and phlegmatic Chinese,' who is able to face with a 'clear-eyed endurance' unbelievable discomforts and evils. And it is this endurance, this infinite patience and industry and indomitable cheerfulness, which is the birthright of Wang and which one day will make him conquer the earth."

There was such a look of primitive force in Sam Wang's face as he ended that Mahlee, in spite of herself, gave a little cry of sympathetic admiration.

"And is this man truly you?"

Wang's yellow skin flushed at the involuntary tribute of her tone.

"Yes," he said, "he is my true self—the self for whom I mean to fight."

"Against Sam?"

"To the death! against Sam and all his damnable race."

His violence at once brought back her old defiance.

"If that is true," she said coldly, "we are enemies, Dr. Wang, since, as I have told you before, I count myself one of the white race."

And, as if the interview were ended, she opened the organ again and began to play a brilliant passage from Mozart. Sam Wang looked at her and smiled with a sort of indulgence. He felt that he could afford to wait.

"That is not the music you really like?" he said when she had finished.

"How do you know what I really like?" asked Mahlee haughtily.

"I heard you playing this morning and it was like a call to my blood." He whistled a low vibrant strain with an indescribable rhythm.

She listened, startled; no one had ever attempted to reproduce her strange music. Forgetting her hauteur, she said critically:

"That is not quite right."

Dr. Wang, standing behind her, grinned.

"Show me how it goes." He leaned over her, touching the keys, as if groping for the right notes.

"It is this way," said Mahlee. She began one of those weird incomprehensible strains in minor key which she had never before been induced to play in the presence of another. And as the barbaric melody entered into Sam Wang's soul, his face took on a martial aspect as of one secretly girding himself for a mighty contest.

"A sword-thrust, by Kwanti's beard! Here, hold your hand over it, Mahlee, while I get some instruments and fresh bandages." He ran from the room.

Mahlee, with one hand held tightly over the blood-soaked cloth, gently drew with the other Andrew's head to her breast. She brooded over his white face with eyes full of passion, but all unconscious, and at her mercy as it lay, some fine pride held it sacred from her lips. Yet she kept his head shamelessly where she had drawn it, during all of Sam Wang's manipulations of the wound, in spite of the Eurasian's ironic grin, more ugly and savage, if possible, than his scowl.

XIII

ANDREW HANDEL had a protracted fever. The wound had become infected and proved difficult to heal. Dr. Wang ordered the sick man to bed and gave him his untiring attention and best skill. He had even seemed to take pleasure in proposing to Mrs. Templeton that Mr. Handel be given a room in the house, so that Mahlee could be constituted nurse without shock to the proprieties. He said that it was a case which would require intelligent watching on the part of the caretaker: and since Mrs. Templeton was occupied with other duties, he knew of no one to whom he would be more willing to intrust the service than to Mahlee. With an intelligence which in ordinary action was as direct as lightning, Sam Wang had also a full measure of the Oriental's cunning in matters where his passions were involved. Had he noticed and rightly interpreted the slight shrinking of the young missionary at Mahlee's too joyous cry of welcome? Did he already foresee a galling humiliation for the proud Eurasian girl?

Certainly the irony of his smile deepened as he watched Mahlee's almost wifely bearing by the sick man's bedside. She rearranged his pillows a dozen times a day, brought him his food and drink with her own hands, and culled fresh flowers daily for his room.

Andrew, at first, could scarcely conceal his embarrassment; the expression of his gratitude was excessive; he begged her at each moment to spare herself such unnecessary pains, saying that he could "manage very well" himself. But after Dr. Wang had informed him very soberly that he was far more ill than he believed,

and must submit to being "babied," he gave himself up to her care without more ado.

In seeing Andrew once more, in caring for him so intimately, Mahlee's long subconscious passion blossomed like a rose. In its perfection even her mystical jealousy of the Madonna on the wall vanished. It was as if the strength of the new force within her had killed every doubt. She did not fear Andrew's asceticism. Every movement, every gesture, betrayed her new hope. In her exalted conception of the young missionary's nature, she scorned to hide her tenderness. Coquetry and coyness were means of enticing trivial passions. Great love could only be rightfully won by great love! She dared not fail to show him that hers was indeed great.

Some subtle influence seemed to be diffused over her. Never did she appear more wholly European, betray less the Asiatic, than in these days. Her heavy lids opened more frankly, more freely, showing eyes of limpid blue. Her voice took on a warmer timbre; her laugh was velvety, low and very sweet. And when she moved, it was with all her old grace, lissome and undulating "like a willow in the wind." No more apings of stiff Byzantine Madonnas! She believed absolutely that Andrew would soon be hers. In truth, her impulse towards freedom and love, when once let loose, transformed to its own desire her idea of the young missionary. She was convinced that he, like herself, was inwardly (albeit perhaps still unconsciously) panting for joy. They had both sought for it on celestial heights and found it not. Now she would lure him down to the sweet levels of earth; they would run hand in hand through green fields and find it in the smell of common leaves and flowers, in the warmth of everyday sunlight.

And with these thoughts, she would gaze at Andrew when he slept, and smile in a sort of innocent volupté with fluted lips red as the heart of a pomegranate.

Most of the missionaries in the compound perceiving

this new change in Mahlee, believed that she had fallen in love with Dr. Wang. As Mrs. Parmelee argued very astutely, Mahlee had shown none of the "symptoms" before the doctor's arrival, "so it could not be *Andrew*." It was thought, indeed, that the sentiment was mutual in the hearts of the two Eurasians, and that Sam Wang had appointed Mahlee as Andrew's nurse so that he, himself, as doctor in the case, might have an opportunity of seeing the girl more intimately than he otherwise could do. Mrs. Parmelee said sententiously that "Mahlee's life problem would now be solved," adding as an afterthought of secondary importance, "and for that matter, Dr. Wang's also. I do hope she'll be able to teach him better manners." Sam Wang had not been a favourite with the ladies of the mission since the disbanding of the committee of welcome, but viewed as the solution to Mahlee's "life problem" he became tolerable again.

"She really deserves someone better, though," Mrs. Parmelee pursued the subject with her husband. "For she has shown during the past year a wonderful saintliness. And sometimes, if I did not know that Dr. Wang had come out as a missionary, I could almost believe he was not a Christian at all."

Her husband, who had had more than once the same feeling in regard to Dr. Wang, thought it wisest to hold his peace. It was his wife who finished the conversation.

"Ah, well," she said in a tone of musing pity. "Poor Mahlee could hardly have hoped to marry a white man, so it is just as well she had fallen in love with one of her own kind, even though she is so infinitely his superior."

That was in fact the general opinion of the mission. Only Miss McGinnis said in a piqued way to Dr. Kennedy that she thought it "decidedly bad form on Mahlee's part to place herself in a position where she would see so much of *both* the young men." She added

casually that she would be quite willing, were she asked, to relieve Mahlee in the care of Mr. Handel for half the day, even though it would be a great trial for her to be thrown into the society of one so ill-bred as Dr. Wang. Miss Dorn, who heard her, rounded her prim lips for sarcastic utterance, when she caught Dr. Kennedy's stern eye and desisted. But the next moment the latter burst into a laugh herself, and kissed Miss McGinnis on her plump pink cheeks.

"My sweet Claribel," she said, "it is very clear that we must get you married soon, or you'll be making a charming little fool of yourself."

At which, Miss McGinnis first pouted, then dimpled all over with shameless eagerness.

"Do!" she cried, throwing her fat little arms around her friend's neck. "Do get me married!"

Mrs. Templeton, alone, divined the truth concerning Mahlee. She knew that it was Andrew Handel and not Sam Wang whom the girl loved. The matter gave her much anxiety, for she shared Sam Wang's own sense (although without his exultation in it) of the almost certain humiliation in store for the girl. She would probably have insisted upon nursing Andrew herself, to have saved Mahlee from being thrown so intimately with the object of her passion, had not her husband just at that time required her care. He had come down with an acute attack of bronchitis the day after Handel's return and although he begged his wife to "go to our dear Andrew since it is obvious that he is the sicker man of the two," she made up her mind quite rightly that her first duty was to her own, and scarcely left his bedside. But as the girl's happy laugh floated to her from across the hall where Andrew Handel lay, this kind foster mother prayed that if disillusionment and sorrow awaited poor Mahlee, she might be given grace to accept them nobly.

XIV

ANDREW HANDEL had passed from his first feeling of embarrassment to a sort of impersonal gratitude for Mahlee's care. His pale eyes had lost that look of half-adoring admiration with which he had followed the girl in the days when he had described her to his mother, as "a lady rich in holiness." Now she seemed to him something less. Yet he was too ill to ask himself in just what the lessening lay. He only listened a little startled to the new vibration in her voice, and caught with something of an inward shiver, as he opened his eyes after sleep, that full bright gaze of hers and the confident luxury of her smile. But he never failed even in his weakest moments to thank her gently for each new ministration; and one day when he was again able to sit up in a chair he made her an almost ceremonious speech in which he praised her "excellent skill in nursing" and called her at the end, in a renewal of his thanks, "my kind young sister." The girl blushed vividly at this and thanked him gravely in return, yet seemed not wholly pleased.

In the first letter that Handel wrote to his mother, at the beginning of his convalescence after the fever had been broken, he referred to Mahlee without apparent self-consciousness.

"Owing to the absorption of Mrs. Templeton's whole time and attention by the bedside of her husband, who has been suffering ever since my own illness from a severe bronchitis," he explained, "the task of nursing me has devolved upon Mahlee. She has performed this delicate duty with commendable tact and patience, proving that even in one of such ambiguous birth, the

Lord can plant and bring to fruition the seed of a true and noble womanliness."

This was sincere praise. Yet one keen in spiritual discernments might have detected in it a shade of disappointment. There were no more of those half-awed ejaculations of wonder to which he had given way in former epistles when writing of Mahlee. After all, she was not to be the great saint—the exotic century-flower of grace and holiness that he had watched for—but in a lesser degree, she was still "commendable."

And gradually in these days of languor he began to take unconscious comfort in her presence, and even regarded with less shrinking those signs of love which Mahlee by reason of some singular pride of her own, took no pains to conceal, though her native delicacy kept them within the bounds of an exquisite discretion. Indeed, he chose to interpret them as the marks of an affectionate friendship which had reached its natural fearlessness after their long association at the mission. An underlying recognition of this sophistry may not have been without charm for the young missionary, for behind the ascetic, the esthete in him had a keen appreciation of the girl's singular beauty.

If Sam Wang noticed this undercurrent he showed no alarm, guessing as he did what the measure of reaction might be in a nature like Andrew Handel's. He still met Mahlee's eyes, turning suddenly hostile and defiant whenever he entered the room, with that gleam of insolent mirth in his own which she had begun to hate, and even vaguely to fear, in spite of her high confidence when alone with Andrew.

A day came when she and Andrew were, indeed, alone. All the other members of the mission, including Dr. and Mrs. Templeton (the former of whom was now recovered), had gone to attend a garden party at the British Legation—one of the few annual occasions in Peking when diplomat and missionary met in a social way.

As it was, by now, the middle of June with the moon at its full, it was expected that the festivities, beginning in the late afternoon would continue on through the evening. Mahlee had refused to leave her "patient," but to everybody's surprise Dr. Wang had, on the contrary, evinced a positive eagerness to go to the affair. Being as little as possible a man whom gatherings of the sort might have been supposed to charm, Mahlee, as well as the others, was at a loss to understand his motive. As he passed out he nodded to Mahlee and Andrew, seated by the broken fountain in the Court of Lilacs with a "Bless you, my children!" which left the girl biting her lips with anger. Even Handel winced under the familiarity, although he replied with a courteous inclination of the head. For whatever different sentiments the young divine may have secretly felt for Dr. Wang he never showed other than those of a dignified friendliness and gratitude.

The sun was already sending horizontal beams through the branches of the trees in the court before the last of the company had departed. Andrew half reclined in a long rattan chair placed in the shallow empty basin of the old fountain at such an angle that the shadow of the ornamental rockery fell over him and struck the sunny pavement beyond in fantastic zig-zag. Mahlee sat near him on a shelf-like projection at the base of the rocks. Both were quiet. Indeed Andrew, who was greatly fatigued, soon closed his eyes, seeing which Mahlee smiled gently, and leaning forward began to fan him with a large palm leaf. He murmured his thanks from half parted lips, smiled a little himself, then dozed, overcome by the languor of the day and his own weakness. In a short time he was sleeping profoundly.

The girl's eyes filled with sudden tears as she bent yearningly over his face. It seemed to her less like a man's than some angels—so white and beautiful. Yet in strange contrast with its unearthly aspect, she saw about the brow small beads of sweat which, forming upon

the excessive paleness of the skin, suggested to her the dews of death. The fancy was so strong that her throat rose in quick anguish and she put out her hand as if to shield the sleeping man from an unseen enemy. But the next moment she laughed to herself with joyous assurance. "No! no! not until we are both grown old together!" And with finger tips soft as cobwebs, she brushed away the drops and stroked back the moist hair from his temples, disclosing as she did so a delicate blue tracery of veins like that on the forehead of a child. Under it she could feel the rhythmical beat of his pulse which stirred her strangely like some mysterious and intimate message sent to her from the depths of his being. She had an unconquerable longing to touch the place with her lips. But her pride still forbade her.

"Yet I shall not have long to wait," she smiled to herself. "For when he wakes he will love me."

It was like a great faith within her created by the ardour of her own desire. Still smiling, she leaned her head back against the rocks and plunged into a dream of the future.

Presently the shadows of the evening commenced to fall. The bees, which all day long had been flashing through the air like drops of concentrated light, now of one accord deserted the flowers. Yet, here and there, through the leaves of the great mulberry and locust, on the pavement of the court and on the old tiled roofs, the late sunshine still quivered in luminous patches. Mahlee, with half closed eyes and open nostrils, drank in the fragrance of new blooms which filled the spacious place—breaths of acacia, jasmine, flowering almond and pomegranate mingled with the predominating scent of the lilacs.

She was suddenly seized by the idea of crowning herself with lilacs that she might be more beautiful at Andrew's awakening. And immediately she rose and began to tip-toe about the court, softly breaking off the

loveliest clusters from the tops of the bushes and twining them with dexterous fingers into a wreath. She chose the purple blooms to harmonise with the blue-black glint of her hair and the deep mauve of the dress she was wearing. But before putting on the wreath, obeying a second impulse, she unloosened all the heavy braids which cowed her head, so that her hair fell in sombre undulating masses to her knees. Then, crowning and interweaving it with the lilacs, she sat down again by Andrew.

There was complete silence now except for the sound of his breathing. Would he ever wake, she smilingly asked herself? Yet even this suspense was exquisite. She was flushed with anticipation. She seemed to stand on the threshold of some radiant new world—an immensity shot through with rainbow-coloured flames. How remote and barren from this warm splendour appeared the lofty summits of her former dreams! She smiled to think that she could ever have deluded herself with so cold a semblance of bliss.

The sun had set and the moon, large and purpureal, was appearing between the pillars of the ornamental arcade on the eastern side of the quadrangle, when, at last, the young missionary stirred. As he opened his eyes, he appeared a little bewildered to find himself in the court, for it was the first time since his illness that he had been out of his room.

“Mahlee!” he called, vaguely.

Instantly the girl was bending over him.

“Yes, here am I!” she replied in a low vibrating voice, as one who makes answer to a long expected summons.

Had some magic love-spell been, in truth, working in him? Or was it only the exhilaration caused by his long sleep and his waking in the fresh air after his weeks of confinement in a sick chamber? For the opalescent fires in his pale eyes were all in play as he gazed up at her,

and the precise inflections of his ordinary voice had utterly disappeared when he spoke.

"Why! you look like some beautiful Bacchante," he exclaimed, "with wild grapes in your hair."

She laughed in soft delight. "Not grapes—only lilacs."

He smiled back at her. Then raising himself to a sitting position on the long chair, looked about him.

"Ah, what a perfect night!" he cried.

The moon, mounting swiftly, whitened as it ascended until it hung a pure silver disc in the clear sky. It let fall upon the steep, curved roofs of the old buildings a magnificent shaft of light which broke against the green faïence in a million emeralds and brought into vivid illumination the heads and protruding eyes of the dragons and gargoyles at the corners of the eaves.

"Yes, it is beautiful, and it is only the beginning," Mahlee replied in the same low voice.

Andrew looked at her wonderingly. He did not altogether follow her thought, but he was fascinated by her new loveliness. He seemed, in truth, like a man still in his dreams.

"Let us walk about," he said, after a pause. "I think I have enough strength, now." He pushed himself upright by the aid of the chair, but once on his feet, he began to waver.

Mahlee flew to him. "You must lean on me," she said, and drew his arm about her neck so that it rested upon her shoulders.

Very slowly, like a pair of lovers, they began to pace the court, and Andrew Handel trembled as he caught the warmth of the girl's body. She led him into the massed shadows under the big trees, where the soft night folded them in more closely, and the moonshine was subdued to a mild effulgence like the radiance from candles. They had relapsed into total silence. He could see her profile against the dusk of her hair—the delicate outline of

nose and chin ; the heavy-lidded eye, the amorous fluting of the lips, and the small ear with the lobe perforated for the ring she had worn in it as a child. Once, to avoid a low-hanging branch, her head swayed towards his somewhat suddenly, and a strand of her hair intertwined with lilacs, fell across his mouth. They walked on for a few steps, then he faltered, and stood quite still. He had drawn his arm from off her shoulder and now swung about facing her. Never had she seen him so ! Under the transparency of his skin, the blood mounted like red wine in a crystal ; his lips were working, but the teeth underneath were set, and his pupils were so expanded as to make his eyes look jet-black.

She uttered a short inarticulate sound, half fearful, half triumphant ; then waited, her throat rising and falling in quick pants. For a moment longer he swayed unsteadily, crushing with his hand the blossom of a night-blooming jasmine which had attached itself to the trunk of the large locust tree under which they were standing. Its heavy odour, made doubly powerful by the pressure, filled the air as if a vial of some highly concentrated perfume had been shattered. And suddenly, he stooped, caught one of her hands in his own and raised it tremblingly, eagerly, towards his lips. But before he had touched them to it, a sudden breeze parted the thick canopy of leaves above, letting in a strong shaft of moonlight. It struck the long fingers which lay in his ; and he saw their yellow gleam. . . .

Andrew Handel recoiled slowly, almost imperceptibly, the blood receding from his face and the fires dying in his eyes. Then, with a deliberate movement, which was yet half reluctant, he let Mahlee's hand fall from his own.

XV

BURSTS of laughter from the returning missionaries bidding good-night to each other, sounded noisily from the further side of one of the arcades. Mahlee tore off her lilac-garlands and with swift shamed movements, almost as one who fears to be caught naked, secured her hair tightly again to her head. In another moment, Dr. and Mrs. Templeton entered the moonlit court followed by Sam Wang and a tall English girl of about eighteen. As he came forward Dr. Wang shot a swift glance at Andrew and Mahlee, standing conspicuously apart under the locust tree, and for an instant the muscles of his large face vibrated curiously as if he had experienced some acute and exquisite sensation. The Eurasian girl met the leaping triumph in his eyes with a queer vacant stare, yet bowed courteously as, without waiting for Mrs. Templeton to fulfil the office, he swept out his hand towards the young woman at his side.

“Miss Sackville—Mahlee.”

He paused on the final clause of the introduction just long enough to make the absence of the surname painfully apparent; and then presented Andrew Handel. The young missionary, visibly relieved though he was by the entrance of the others, bowed with constraint. He seemed to suffer a certain uneasiness, not to say displeasure, in being discovered alone with the Eurasian girl by this unknown and elegant young woman; nor was his satisfaction complete when Mrs. Templeton explained that Mahlee had been Mr. Handel's nurse during a serious illness following upon a wound which he had received from the Boxers in Shantung.

“Ah, really!” exclaimed Miss Sackville, looking from

Andrew to Mahlee with polite concern. In the moon-light she was discernible as a girl of about Mahlee's height and build, fair-haired and white-browed, with large frank eyes. She was dressed in some frothy white stuff, and wore a bunch of flowers which Andrew Handel made out with a little thrill to be lilies of the valley. They grew in his mother's garden in Vermont. He had not seen them since he had left home.

"But the nurse on the case is honourably discharged to-night," said Dr. Wang, "since, thanks to her excellent care, I am now able to pronounce the patient completely recovered."

There was an indefinable accent in his voice which made Mahlee flush violently. But she replied in a dry, matter-of-fact tone, without glancing at Andrew:

"Thank you, Dr. Wang. I am glad if my duty is done that I can now be relieved."

"Poor child!" Mrs. Templeton exclaimed within herself. "So it is come already." Then pitying Andrew, whom she saw wince and attempt to stammer his gratitude, she said:

"Certainly it is a joy to know that our dear Andrew is well again. Do I understand that you are taking him back to your own house this evening, Dr. Wang? . . . Yes! Then we will all say good-night. Miss Sackville, who has never been in a foreign mission station before, has come for the express purpose of visiting every department of our work, and will need to be up early."

"Yes, I want to take in everything," said the girl.

They separated for the night; Miss Sackville walking with Mahlee behind the old people. As the four mounted the verandah steps, and stood for a moment in front of the door waiting for the servant to open it, their silhouettes were thrown in strong shadow against the panelling in such a way that the profiles of the two girls came face to face on the same level.

The young men, moved by a simultaneous impulse,

had turned in the middle of the court on their way to their rooms. Suddenly Sam Wang clutched the missionary's arm.

"Do you see that?" he said in excited whisper. "Their profiles on the door! The nose, the chin, the forehead—the entire outline—exactly alike! That resemblance has been baffling me all day; but by the Lord! I could swear now they were hatched from the same egg!"

But Andrew Handel, who, either from fatigue or humiliation, was in a state, indeed, a "little lower than the angels," made a movement of impatience.

"If that be so," he said coldly, "the resemblance ends with the outline. For as any one can see even in the moonlight, Miss Sackville is as fair as a lily."

Later, in the guest-room with Mahlee, the English girl became confidential.

"I feel very lucky," she said, "to have a chance to see a mission from the inside. I've long wanted to."

Mahlee began to light the candles.

"You see," Miss Sackville continued, "I'm keeping a diary of my experiences in the Far East, and shall devote several pages to my impressions on Foreign Missions. I'm sure to be asked when I get home whether I believe in them. Papa doesn't. Indeed, he's quite opposed, but Mamma says they're very worthy institutions. It was she who let me accept Mrs. Templeton's kind invitation. She thought that since there is so much discussion on the question now, it would be just as well to have one member of the family, at least, informed as to the real facts. Besides it will be excellent material for my journal—good sober stuff, you know, after all the balls. Papa says if the diary proves interesting enough he'll have it printed for circulation among our friends."

The Eurasian moved away to draw the curtains.

"May I ask in what capacity you're employed here?" the other pursued as if determined to lose no time in her collection of data. "You're a trained nurse, are you not?" Innocently as the question was put it set the colour surging like molten gold in Mahlee's cheeks.

"No," she said without turning, "I am not a professional nurse, nor am I 'employed,' if you mean by that, doing something for money. This is my home." Her tone conveyed a subtle rebuke such as one gentlewoman might give to another who had mistaken her for an inferior.

Miss Sackville was quick to catch it and change her own tone.

"Oh!" she said, "I beg your pardon. I didn't understand. You are Miss Templeton, of course. How stupid of me! But really your mother didn't tell me that you were here, and I failed to catch your name when Dr. Wang introduced us. I find your parents charming," she added, as if anxious to soothe the other's wounded sensibilities.

Mahlee finished adjusting the curtains.

"They are not my real parents," she said.

Then as the other looked at her curiously with a polite "Indeed?" some impulse difficult to explain led her to repeat that foolish boast which had already drawn forth Sam Wang's irony.

"My father is a foreign mandarin," she said, and regretted her words the next instant, as she foresaw in the frank, albeit astonished delight of the English girl, the necessity for a humiliating explanation.

"A foreign mandarin!" the latter exclaimed, suddenly struck by Mahlee's beauty. "You mean somebody with a title,—a person of the aristocracy? Oh, how nice! I wonder if we have any mutual friends. But what a quaint original way of expressing it,—a foreign mandarin. Fancy! Do you mean that he's had a 'button'

bestowed upon him by the Chinese Government like some of the gentlemen at the legations?"

"That may be the case," said Mahlee drily. "I have not seen him for years."

"Ah, how sad!" exclaimed Miss Sackville with quick sympathy. "I don't know how I could live away from Papa. We're the greatest cronies imaginable."

She seized Mahlee's hand with a pretty gesture. "You must come to see me at the legation," she said impulsively. "We're making quite a protracted stay in Peking, you know. My father is Sir Philip Sackville, a retired army officer. He's served all over the East. He used to be here about twenty years ago, and had even then an idea of writing a book about the Manchu Dynasty. And now he is really doing it, so he has to remain at the Capital to interview the Chinese Court officials. You will come, won't you, dear Miss ——" She paused in some embarrassment.

"Mahlee, simply Mahlee," the other supplied hastily.

Miss Sackville looked a little startled, then pleased.

"Oh, how charming of you! You mean I'm to call you by your Christian name. Then you must call me Blanche. I'm sure we'll soon be like sisters. I've just been yearning to have a girl friend here, but Mamma doesn't like me to associate with anybody outside our own kind of people. But she'll be delighted when she knows I've discovered you. If it doesn't seem too curious, may I ask how you come to be living at this mission?"

At the question a strange look came into the Eurasian's face. In a spirit of self-directed irony she seemed to take delight in making her answer as bald as possible. though, no doubt, a part of her frankness was due to the realisation that her story would be told by others if not by herself.

"Certainly," she said in an even voice, "I will tell you, if it can be of the slightest interest to you. I was

brought here more than four years ago on the back of a Ya-bah, or deaf-mute, after wounding myself at my old home in a Chinese coffin-yard in a remote part of the city. As Madame Ling, my grandmother, and only known relative except a dissolute Chinese uncle, died that same night, I never returned."

The pretty shell-pink in her listener's face deepened to a painful scarlet, visible by the candle light.

"I—I fear I don't quite understand," she stammered.

Mahlee repeated her statement in the same even voice.

"A Chinese coffin-yard! Madame Ling, your grandmother—a dissolute Chinese uncle!" Miss Sackville echoed the words this time after Mahlee in distressed bewilderment. "But I thought—I understood you to say that your father was a nobleman—a 'foreign mandarin,' as you expressed it."

"That is what my grandmother affirmed of him," said Mahlee with a curious defiant pride, "and I believe it to be true."

She stood up very erect. The young English girl was awed by her air.

"Am I to understand then—" she began in the utmost confusion, "that your father—that you are—are—" she stuttered and stopped short, the colour flooding her face.

"I am an Eurasian," Mahlee said quietly, "without a name."

"Oh!" cried Blanche Sackville.

They gazed at each other. Some mutual attraction held them. It was almost a recognition. But they were divided—divided as effectually as if the air had suddenly been cleaved between them, leaving the interspace a vacuum. Behind them, on the wall beyond the candles, their silhouettes were again shadowed face to face with the outline of the features identical.

For a moment they stood thus. Then with a sharp

backward movement of the head, Mahlee broke the silence.

"Good-night," she said. Her tone had an odd metallic ring, and yet it was perfectly courteous.

"Good-night," replied the English girl very kindly.

For another second, their gaze met; then, with the bearing of a young queen, the Eurasian left the room.

XVI

UPON entering the dining room the next morning, Blanche Sackville greeted Mahlee in a manner a little constrained but exceedingly kind; and the Eurasian, on her side, though even more than usually silent, conducted herself with fine courtesy as a woman of distinction who does honour to a guest of equal degree. It was only when Andrew Handel appeared in the doorway that a slight painful tremor passed through her.

"Dr. Wang has insisted upon my coming in for a cup of coffee," Handel said with some embarrassment after a "Good morning" which he directed towards the company in general without glancing at Mahlee. He was looking very pale, and explained that the new cook whom Dr. Wang had engaged since his arrival was plunged in an opium stupor and had neglected to prepare any breakfast.

"The Doctor himself," he added with an effort at pleasantry, "is feasting off *jou-po-pos* bought on the street; he says he prefers Chinese food to European, but declares I am not fit for anything but Christian cooking."

Dr. and Mrs. Templeton gave a little hospitable exclamation of concern, and Mahlee leapt instinctively to her feet and placed an armchair with cushions at the table.

"Do sit down," she murmured.

Andrew, who had been looking at Miss Sackville, coloured uncomfortably.

"Thank you," he said with an accent almost of impatience, "but an ordinary chair is all that I require. I am no longer to be counted an invalid, you know."

And ignoring the armchair, he seated himself on a

straight-backed one by the side of Miss Sackville, whom he addressed with a formality which did not disguise his eagerness. Her morning freshness somehow reminded him of springtime in the Vermont hills where he had wandered as a boy in search of white flowers—he had always had a passion for white flowers—and as he spoke to the young girl the lines of the poet came to his mind :

*“Hast thou looked upon the breath
Of the lilies at sunrise ?”*

“The chapel is open this morning,” he told her, “and if you will permit me, I will show you our organ. It is a gift from a lady in New York who visited the mission last year. We have had it less than six months and are very proud of it.”

“Indeed ! and do you play it !” Miss Sackville asked. His former impatient accent in speaking to Mahlee, and the look of proud pain it had left on the Eurasian’s face, had not escaped her, and by way of delicate rebuke her own voice expressed but a mediocre interest.

Dr. Templeton answered for Handel. “Wonderfully—beautifully,” and his wife echoed his enthusiasm. But the young missionary remonstrated against such undue praise.

“Hardly that at any time ; and at present, especially, I am much out of practice. But I am anxious to run over some old things and should be very glad to do so this morning if you care to hear the organ.”

Miss Sackville answered this time with more pleasure.

“That will be a treat. I have not heard any organ music since I left Europe.”

As they rose from the table, she turned to Mahlee. “You will come, too, won’t you ?” she said with a smile.

The Eurasian hesitated ; then, as Handel echoed the invitation, albeit with some feebleness, she replied : “Certainly, if you wish.”

But the next moment her heart contracted sharply as

she saw the pleasure vanish from his face. He had hoped she would excuse herself as Dr. and Mrs. Templeton had already done. He wanted to be alone with this stranger! Something shot through Mahlee like a poisoned arrow. All her love, all her cherishing of him, and her dreams of his love poured out to her in return, were to end in this! Her eyes narrowed; her skin itself seemed to darken. Beside the fair English girl with her lily-like beauty, she might have been compared to some strange tawny orchid. Yet as they passed across the court together towards the chapel, the subtle resemblance between the two girls which Sam Wang had pointed out the evening before, suddenly startled Handel in spite of himself. But again he thrust the idea aside impatiently, as something displeasing and even indiscreet.

They came into the yard where the white chapel with its belfry stood between the two great stoles which the defunct mandarin, who had once been master of the place, had reared to his ancestors. Blanche Sackville admired the enormous stone tortoises which upheld them.

"The tortoise in China is a symbol of longevity and peace," said Andrew, "and in building the chapel, Dr. Templeton decided that they should not be removed."

At the young girl's request, he read and translated the extraordinary list of virtues recorded in praise of the mandarin's forefathers.

The interior of the chapel was extremely simple with scarcely any architectural ornament, and no other wall decorations than scrolls inscribed with scriptural texts in Chinese characters similar to those in the Inquirers' class-room which Sam Wang had so wantonly destroyed. The organ with its pipes, painted in blue and gold, was built into the wall at one side of the pulpit. Andrew placed two chairs for the young women near the organ bench; then seating himself, he began to run his fingers

at random over the keys. His hands, since his illness, had become thin and white almost to transparency, but the touch of the organ seemed to fill them with a fine quivering strength. Blanche Sackville watched them with delight; then, as Andrew suddenly bent forward over the instrument and struck the opening chords of the Glória in Bach's Mass in B Minor, her eyes glistened. She had once sung the part at a musical festival at her church at home, and before she was aware of it, she was joining in the aria with a bird-like soprano.

"Laudamus te . . . laudamus te . . . laudamus te, benedicimus te, adoramus te, glorificamus te—"

Her voice, pure and clear, might have been that of a Beatrice hymning her praise in the Empyrean. She had risen to her feet and was turned towards Handel. Mahlee could see his eyes fixed upon the young girl's face, and knew by their expression that he had totally forgotten her own presence.

A dumb anguish possessed her. She had never heard Andrew play so well before, and she was enough of a critic to know that Blanche Sackville's soprano was remarkably beautiful, but she shrank back on her chair as if her ears were being assailed by hideous discords. What had her soul to do with this Christian music? If it were in reality sublime and harmonious, and the discords all in herself, it was torture to her none the less. It produced in her something almost like physical pain. She clenched her hands to keep herself from shrieking as the beautiful chant rose higher.

"Laudamus te . . . benedicimus te . . . adoramus te . . ."

She saw Blanche Sackville's uplifted face and Andrew's eyes like lambent flames turned to it. At the conclusion of the piece, Mahlee was shaking with pain and jealousy.

"Your voice is exquisite, dear Miss Sackville,"

Andrew murmured in the tone of one who has been in Paradise.

The young girl blushed. "You are a rare accompanist," she answered. Then, as if to break the spell which the music had cast upon them, she turned to Mahlee.

"Do you not play or sing?" she asked.

Mahlee broke into an odd little laugh.

"I have never tried to sing, and I scarcely know whether what I do on the organ can be called playing or not."

"Then won't you give me an opportunity to judge?" the girl begged politely. She was sincerely interested in this curious creature and deeply sorry for her. It is very possible that she divined the situation between Mahlee and the young missionary.

"Yes, Mahlee," interposed Handel, "pray gratify Miss Sackville's wish. You know that you can play the organ very creditably when you try.—Mahlee was my pupil in music for several years," he explained to the English girl, "and although it is some time since she has had a lesson, I am sure she remembers many of her old selections."

He rose from the organ bench and invited the Eurasian to take it. There was something slightly patronising in his air. He had, in fact, decided that the scene of the previous evening might be honourably dismissed from his mind. After all, he had done nothing to compromise his dignity, and for some reason his thankfulness for that fact showed itself in a just detectable assertion of superiority.

The girl felt it, and a queer rebellious flash shot out from between her heavy lids.

"Since you both ask me," she said, in that even tone in which she had made the confession of her birth to Blanche Sackville, "I will play."

And taking the vacated seat, she spread out her long

fingers and let them fall on the key-board. Instantly the little chapel was filled with a weird whisper, multiple, insistent, reiterative as from many voices in clandestine council, followed by a subdued crackling like the laughter issuing from some unlighted subterranean world.

So uncannily real was it, that Blanche Sackville paled and looked about her in fright, while Handel cried sternly :

“Mahlee, what is this you are playing?”

But the Eurasian answered in a voice which he had never heard.

“Let me alone ! let me alone ! It is my turn now—my music ; the voices of my ancestors, the old yellow people, whispering and laughing in their graves.”

And with a peculiar gliding of her fingers over the keys, the crackling laughter prolonged itself into a howl of mirth.

Yee ! yee ! yee !

“They are drinking their rice brandy now, and growing merry. But it is war, war of which they talk—Listen !”

Under her hands, an indescribable din burst forth. Deep base notes as from the beating of gongs and temple bells boomed in formidable undertone to a shrill tormenting of moon fiddles, samyins and citherns, with the sharp clash of cymbals and wail of Chinese flutes. And as if stimulated to frenzy by this diabolical orchestra, the shouts of laughter became infuriated squalls. Then suddenly the organ emitted a heavy reverberating sound like the breaking asunder of rocks and clods. Mahlee was bending intently over the key-board.

“They are rising from the earth,” she said. “The Great Dragon is belching them forth to revenge the outrages it has suffered. The old Tartar hordes of Ghengis Khan are bursting from their graves to fight and kill again.”

As she played, the Eurasian's lips drew back from her teeth in a strange smile ; her cheek bones seemed to rise higher on her face.

"To fight and kill again!" she repeated. "Hark, to the trumpets proclaiming war in the land!" And with the words she drew from the pipes a succession of blasts so hoarse and blood-curdling that Blanche Sackville screamed.

"Stop! Mahlee! Stop! I command you!" cried Andrew Handel, white with disgust and anger. For a moment he had imagined himself back as a prisoner in the camp of the Boxers.

"Yee! yee! yee!"

The organ had stopped, but a laugh in exact imitation of that from Mahlee's underworld braves rang through the chapel. Sam Wang advanced, grinning extravagantly.

"I perceive that I break in upon a concourse of all the harmonies," he said, "but a dramatic entrance is my special rôle of late, and I could not resist seizing this occasion for one. I've been waiting here at the door for the precise psychological moment. Miss Sackville, you look as if you were in need of fresh air and smelling salts. Handel, pray escort her out like the perfect gentleman you are. No! I see you are ready to faint yourself. I must conduct you both. Permit me, ladies."

He ironically included the missionary in the last term, and seizing an arm of each, hurried them with expressions of mock concern to the door.

"Poor things! You *do* look white. Mahlee's music has been too much for you. There,—there, may you revive!"

And with a movement not unlike a shove, he had them out and had closed the door.

XVII

His small beady eyes glittered as he turned them upon Mahlee.

She was in a mood to rejoice in the insolent audacity of the man, and suffered for a moment the bold admiration of his gaze before she spoke with some sarcasm, but no rebuke.

"So you have come to share my isolation again?"

"Isolation no longer!" he cried, his enthusiasm bursting bonds. "With that music in your soul, you have only to call, for millions to rise and follow you. I am here to point you to your destiny which you must already feel."

She gave him a startled look, but he continued with excitement.

"Mahlee! Mahlee! You are tremendous! As I listened to the blare of your trumpets, I imagined you the Jeanne d'Arc of China leading us all to victory. Whether you know it or not, you are one of us. You are as good as committed to the Cause."

"One of you!" she echoed in a voice become suddenly intense. "'The Cause'! Do you mean, then, that you are a Boxer?"

He measured her, wary for a second, then made his decision.

"It is my proudest title!" he said boldly.

Her eyes rested upon him with a mingling of horror and admiration. "You have dared!" she cried, and again, as if she found the thing incredible. "You dare!"

He burst into a laugh. "I stand revealed in all my hideous hypocrisy. Yet certainly after our conversa-

tion of some months ago, you cannot have imagined, like the other pious idiots, that I was really here as a missionary of the Gospel?"

"No, I was scarcely a victim to that delusion, but—"

"But you wondered why I was here at all—what I was up to?—You shall know all," he said motioning her to be seated and taking a chair himself. "While you have been nursing your sweet ascetic, I have been hard at work. My hospital on Pheasant Lane has already become a bureau for secret despatches from Shantung. In this service my two greatest helpers are the Eurasians, Sing and Chung, who, with myself, were once known in the mission as the Devil's Triplets. They turned up a few weeks ago from the northern plains where they deal in camels and dress in sheepskins. With them as my agents I am now in direct communication with many of the leaders of the I Ho Ch'uan. When I have this end of the work fully organised, I shall go myself to Shantung where I am already known as the Illustrious Patriot Ching Lin. Under this name, and with the secret protection of the Governor Yü Hsien, I shall be able to acquire a far-reaching influence. My knowledge of surgery coupled with a certain skill I have in jugglery, learned as a boy, will make me seem like a veritable man of miracles. Even since my arrival I have gained many adherents in this city by my cures, among whom I am proud to number several former Christian converts. You know, for instance, the old crone Huang-ma who welcomed me with such violent invectives. Well, I removed her cataracts and now she is one of my most assiduous workers."

"Workers!" Mahlee again echoed aghast. "You are working and making others work for the Boxer Cause under the very eyes of the missionaries!"

"Under their very eyes, if they have any eyes," he answered with light contempt. "Fortunately for my

purposes, the hospital is outside the compound, and the East Bell Street Dispensary, still further away, can be readily made into another centre for activity." He looked at her with whimsical impudence. "In fact, I'm reserving the place for you. There are rooms in the Dispensary building adapted for housekeeping arrangements. With Huang-ma as your servant, you could live there very comfortably and carry on a work of proselytising among women."

The suggestion sent the blood strongly to her face. Yet he saw, not without a quicker beating of his heart, that it was not entirely displeasing to her. He had rightly gauged the strength of her jealous passion. He went on speaking rapidly that she might have no chance for reply.

"It is to be a fair game," he said. "We'll give the foreign devils plenty of time to take to their heels,—enter into swine, if they like, and all precipitate themselves into the sea. It will only be in case they ignore our repeated hints to evacuate that we shall bring a little pressure to bear upon them."

"But if it comes to that, you will not stop at bloodshed?" she faltered. "You are prepared to shed the blood of your father's race—of these we know?"

His face darkened.

"If it is necessary."

"You would sacrifice even your benefactors!" she cried. "Old Dr. Templeton—Mrs. Templeton—my foster parents!"

"No," he said looking at her oddly. "I have thought of them for your sake. Long before any outbreak occurs in Peking, they will be in America."

As her glance questioned him, he explained: "Dr. Templeton has a bad cough. As his doctor I prescribe a year's furlough. Nothing is more simple. By the end of the summer, they will be on their way home. I promise you that, Mahlee," he spoke with a certain

eagerness, and repeated, "and as for the others, it will be a fair game."

They gazed at each other for a long moment.

"And what is your purpose in putting me in possession of your secrets?" she finally asked in a tone of studied inexpressiveness.

"That you may become one of us," he answered with deliberation, still looking into her eyes.

A slight spasm seized her, followed by a flash of feigned anger. "How can you hope that of me!" she cried. "Have I not told you that I count myself one of the white race?"

But even to herself her voice carried no conviction, and she felt the feebleness of her threat as she added: "What reason have you to trust me? Are you not afraid of revelation—of arrest?"

"I take the chance," he said calmly. Under the black mane of his hair his eyes showed like two points of steel in his enormous yellow face.

The girl shuddered, and without another word left the chapel.

XVIII

MAHLEE and Blanche Sackville did not meet again that day. The Eurasian locked herself in her room, refusing to go to both luncheon and tea on the ground of a severe headache; and when towards evening she finally emerged, she was told by Miss McGinnis, whom she met in the Court of Lilacs, that the English girl had returned to the legation accompanied by Andrew Handel.

"Just think!" exclaimed Miss McGinnis joyfully, not noticing Mahlee's expression. "She gave fifty pounds sterling to the Kindergarten, and I'm sure would have given as much to the girls' school if Miss Dorn hadn't corrected her pronunciation. Of course, it's a good thing to be correct, but, personally, I think Miss Dorn overdoes it. It was apropos of my babies, too," she ran on. "I had them all decked out in their prettiest flowered tunics, with new red and green strings to their pigtails, and those cunning little round caps with the gorgeous ear-tassels and devil-chasers, you know. They did look sweet, for a fact, and Miss Sackville seemed perfectly charmed. She took little Toy up in her arms and patted all the others on the head, and said she wouldn't believe that China was half so decadent as people made out as long as it produced such delightful chubby babies. It was then that Miss Dorn corrected her.

"'Decadent, did you say?' she cried out. (You know how she does? I was just *too* ashamed!) 'Are you perfectly positive that the accent falls on the penult instead of the antepenult?' Poor Miss Sackville looked actually frightened, and answered quite gently that

she wasn't positive at all. But I noticed she went away without giving Miss Dorn any money."

"Ah, indeed!" said Mahlee vaguely: she had scarcely listened since she had been told that Andrew Handel had accompanied the English girl home, and even now she hoped that she had misunderstood. "Did you say," she added in an indifferent tone, "that Mr. Handel went back to the legation with Miss Sackville?"

"Yes, and by the way he acts, I could believe that he's falling in love with her already." Miss McGinnis' voice was not without a touch of resentment. "Fancy! in his weak condition insisting on accompanying her home. It was quite unnecessary—really almost bad form. And she didn't want him very much either; that was plain. But good-bye, one of the babies has the colic and I must find Dr. Eliza."

Claribel McGinnis left the court and the Eurasian went back to her own room.

She didn't want him very much? The words had dropped into her heart like a ray of sickly hope. Such a possibility had not occurred to her in all the hours of her lonely strife. And even now the anguish of knowing that those two were together outweighed greatly any other feeling that Miss McGinnis' communication gave her. Truly, the irony of it was bitter enough. Blanche Sackville did not want him; yet he had already begun to follow her. And she—Mahlee—whose soul had so long hungered and thirsted for him, was to be forever denied his love.

But *was* it forever? If Miss Sackville persisted in remaining indifferent, might he not finally come back to her? It was poisoned comfort, surely for one so proud, and yet she did not put it quite away.

"As good as committed, am I?" she said to herself half fiercely as if defying Sam Wang. "That is not yet so certain!"

And she appeared the next morning and for many

months afterwards in her old severe monastic dress in which she had formerly won Andrew Handel's approbation. This was her answer to Sam Wang! He met it with his usual grin, and said nothing. And on her side, a peculiar loyalty which she could not analyse to this man she hated—a loyalty which astonished herself—kept her from revealing a word of what he had told her.

In September, after the return of the missionaries from the hills west of Peking where they were wont to take refuge from the vapourish heat of the Chinese summer, the Templetons, acting upon Dr. Wang's urgent advice, left for America. The entire mission, including Dr. Eliza Kennedy, was agreed upon the necessity for this furlough. Dr. Templeton still coughed, and as everybody knew, if he remained on the field, he could not be made to relax his strenuous efforts.

Mrs. Templeton, thinking deeply upon her duty to the Eurasian girl, had suggested to her husband that Mahlee should go home with them and continue her education in the woman's college in New England where their own daughter, Pearl, was now studying. This would, of course, have meant considerable sacrifice, as the funds would have had to come from their own meagre salary; but Dr. Templeton had instantly approved the plan, and even blamed himself for not being the first to think of it. But when the proposition was made to Mahlee, she had but a moment's hesitation before she decided in the negative. An education in America was certainly tempting, but Andrew Handel was here—and here also was Blanche Sackville! Her jealous love was far stronger than her intellectual ambition. She thanked her foster parents for their great kindness, but said she was needed at the mission and would stay. Mrs. Templeman sighed deeply at her answer. She understood very well the girl's real motive,

and knew that insistence would do no good. Her heart was full of grave misgivings, but Mahlee was not a person from whom one might invite confidence. So the missionary's wife could say nothing.

On the eve of their departure the venerable couple were accorded a big farewell reception by all the missionaries in Peking, as well as the Christian converts at the Ark of the Covenant, almost all of whom Dr. Templeton had himself baptised. The next morning, Mahlee accompanied her foster parents as far as the walls of the city, where Dr. Templeton blessed her tenderly, calling her a true and faithful daughter of the Church; and Mrs. Templeton folded her in her arms and kissed her with warm but anxious affection. Blinded by tears the girl turned from them. Ah, was not her loyalty to these her clearest duty? What had she to do with Wang's hideous proposals? Never, never would she give herself to such treachery. A true and faithful daughter of the Church she was, indeed, and such she would remain.

Shortly after the Templetons were gone, Dr. Wang surprised the missionaries by announcing his intention of taking up the work of famine relief begun by Handel in Kiangsu, province contiguous to Shantung. As the need in this region was known to be urgent and as Wang laughed at the dangers involved, the mission gave its unanimous consent, and the doctor started off on his journey early in October, stating that he would be back by the beginning of the year. He left the hospital on Pheasant Lane in the charge of a native medical assistant, over whom, as was remembered afterwards, he had got complete control.

Mahlee had given him no chance to see her alone since the day in the chapel, but in bidding her good-bye in the presence of the other missionaries, he looked squarely into her eyes and said :

“When I come back in January, Mahlee, I shall appoint you superintendent of the East Bell Street Clinic.”

That was all ; but the Eurasian girl shuddered again, and passed a sleepless night.

XIX

AFTER the departure of her foster-parents, Mahlee lived with the "ladies" at the girls' school. The house in the Court of Lilacs was taken by the Parmelees who gave up their own for the use of the Kindergarten, which, under the care of Miss McGinnis, had grown rapidly and needed separate quarters. Andrew Handel continued to have his rooms in the southern wing of the Court of Lilacs, but after Dr. Wang was gone, took his meals with the Parmelee family.

It was remarked by Mrs. Parmelee that the young missionary avoided Mahlee. On several occasions when he knew that the girl had been invited to dinner, he himself gave some excuse for staying away. This attitude on his part with the return of Mahlee's religious zeal, puzzled Mrs. Parmelee not a little.

"Could it be possible that the poor child dreams—" She once began in her husband's presence, and then broke off without finishing her phrase, adding quickly: "Oh no, of course not! She couldn't be so foolish; she *must* realise."

"Realise what, dear?" asked Mr. Parmelee looking up from a page of statistics.

"The difference—the impossibility, for one so fastidious as Andrew Handel," answered his wife somewhat vaguely.

Then suddenly she threw her arms about her husband's neck. "Oh Morris, thank God! *I* am all white and know my father's name."

Surely if ever one snatched from heathen darkness seemed to deserve the title of a true and faithful daughter of the Church it was Mahlee during the next

three months while Sam Wang was absent in Shantung fanning the flames of Boxer patriotism. The Byzantine Madonna was full of authority again, smiling there on the wall beside the girl's mirror, her vague but benign smile, while she clasped her little son somewhat awkwardly in her arms. But the Eurasian's worship of the Lady of Heaven was no longer the servile imitating of her external aspect which it once had been. Rather, it was now become a sincere and touching attempt to attain to that inward sweetness and grace which the old painter had succeeded in portraying so admirably in his Virgin's face. This change in the quality of her Mariolatry was, in truth, the result of a certain crisis.

One day while looking at the picture Mahlee had been struck by its likeness to Blanche Sackville. Not only might the Madonna's forehead, nose and chin have been modelled from the English girl's (a fact which seemed the more remarkable to Mahlee because those features of the Virgin bore an equally precise similitude to their own) but there was likewise in the painted physiognomy that same mild look of girlish benevolence which Blanche Sackville's face wore, but which the Eurasian knew well that she had never caught.

The discovery had cost Mahlee a day and night of acute jealousy. The Virgin of the picture seemed no longer merely a mystical rival; she became, to her perfervid imagination, nothing less than the actual portrait of the English girl, already adored by Andrew Handel. She remembered how Andrew had commended this Madonna to her as a worthy pattern of virtue. Doubtless, soon, he would be commending Miss Sackville in the same light! She had had in truth a fierce impulse to hack the painting to pieces, and had even seized a sharp Chinese dagger to execute her design. Then the subtle but mighty power of goodness itself—the goodness shining from the face of her rival—had

made her withhold her hand, and she had sunk instead to her knees before the picture with a strange plaintive cry.

"I will be good, too," she had sobbed there in a passion of humility, "and then perhaps he will learn to love me."

So her dream changed once more and her face with it. She made no effort to see or talk with Andrew. Her natural pride forbade that; but she prayed every night long and fervently to be made pure and holy enough for his love. After all, she said to herself, she may have judged too quickly of Andrew's passion for Blanche Sackville. It might well exist only in her own sick fancy. Yes, she might still be happy if she could be patient and good. But this time it must be a true growth of the soul—no mere external sanctity.

And, truly, in this human-divine effort of the Eurasian girl to merit the love for which her soul hungered, there was something infinitely touching. She not only fulfilled all her former duties in the mission with intense zeal, but made for herself new ones. She entered degraded hovels and ministered to the most abject misery. She literally fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and bound with her own hands terrible scrofulous sores as loathsome as those of leprosy.

And on the day before the return of Sam Wang in the month of January, Mahlee had her reward. She was coming back from one of her visits of mercy carrying a sick baby wrapped in a corner of her shawl. It was a tiny girl—a blighted yellow bud cast off in scorn by its own mother who had threatened to choke it to death. In passing through the Court of Lilacs, Mahlee came face to face with Andrew Handel. To her surprise, he stopped and smilingly begged her to let him have a peep at the mite. She uncovered its little wizened face a moment, and he looked at it pityingly.

"It will die before morning," he said, "and perhaps

that is hardly to be regretted." Then, as if seized by some sudden admiration, he fastened his pale eyes upon the Eurasian. "Mahlee, you are doing noble work; you are a holy and sanctified woman." His voice almost trembled with the richness of his approval.

The girl flamed with pleasure, and sped to her room, where she sank with the child into a chair. Ah, then he had noticed! then he had cared! In her need of some outlet for her emotion she bent over the baby and began to croon to it passionately, calling it by all the love-names she could think of. She would not even leave it to go to dinner when Miss McGinnis called her, lest the little thing should become cold, but held it in her arms by the fireplace all the evening, and at last when she had soothed it to sleep, took it with her to bed. It lay against her breast as she slept, and its soft pressure made her dream strangely. Her own little child, it seemed now, with a downy blonde head, and eyes the colour of opals. Hope, she called it—her little daughter, Hope—the sweetest, the most exquisite thing in the world! Her heart felt bursting with joy and tenderness. How great and wonderful life was!

At dawn, Mahlee awoke and found the Chinese baby dead in the curve of her arm.

XX

BUT notwithstanding the omen, Mahlee felt the little Hope close to her heart all that morning. She remembered that it was the day of Sam Wang's return, and she came to a great decision. As soon as he was back she would go to his study without waiting for him to seek her, and tell him that if he did not either leave the mission for good, or promptly sever his connection with the Boxers, she would inform the authorities against him. She could hear in imagination the peal of sardonic laughter with which he would greet her threat, but she would show him that she was serious. And if he killed her—well, *that*, in her exalted mood, seemed a little matter! Would she not be dying for Andrew?

And, in fact, early in the afternoon when she learned that Dr. Wang had arrived at his house, and knew besides that Handel was absent holding a service in the chapel, she made her way with strange temerity to the wing in the Court of Lilacs occupied by the young men. She was admitted by a servant who showed her into Andrew's study, after explaining that the Doctor's rooms were cluttered with things recently unpacked and so unfit for her reception.

Certainly the room into which she had entered was immaculate in its order. There was, indeed, so little in it in comparison to its spaciousness that the idea of an even possible confusion was eliminated. It was one of the old palace chambers with dark coppery walls and finely carved woodwork, the light coming in agreeably through shaded windows. The furniture consisted of some bookcases ranged about the walls, a few ebony

chairs which had belonged to the palace, and a large ebony table placed in the centre of the room and used by Handel as a desk. Over it hung a globe-shaped lantern made of ivory and crimson silk; upon the table were writing materials, a few exquisitely bound books, and a pot of white hyacinths.

Mahlee's face softened. Here he lived and worked. How often from the court had she caught glimpses of him writing at his desk. She approached it and began to finger his books: a New Testament in Greek, Foxe's Book of Martyrs, *De Imitatione Christi*. She remembered that he had given her a copy of the two last on two successive New Year's Days. They were his favourite—his intimate—books and he had wanted her to know them. Ah, he must care for her a little then; and surely there was hope that some day he would care much. She stood smiling softly, caressing the fine leather binding of the *De Imitatione* and murmuring Andrew's name from time to time. In her straight grey gown, with her head slightly bent, she looked not unlike a young nun at her prayers.

Then suddenly something seared her eyes. It was the black writing on the white page of a letter—a letter in his hand, barely begun and torn half across as if judged premature, but left on the table by some strange oversight.

"Beautiful beloved Blanche," Mahlee read, "my fair and spotless Lily, I can no longer restrain my heart, which cries out to you ceaselessly day and night. Yesterday when you gave me your white hand to kiss, I knew that I must make my confession even should you scorn me for it; I knew that I must tell you that I love you utterly——"

"Oh!" The cry was one of exceeding bitterness. He had been seeing her then! He had been with her only yesterday! and he loved her! For a long moment Mahlee did not move. She merely stood repeating a

single phrase of the letter as if groping after some hidden meaning in the words: "Your white hand to kiss . . . your white hand to kiss." At the last repetition she slowly lifted her own hand—the one he had let fall!—until it was with a few inches of her eyes. For several minutes, she gave it her keen attention, examining it as a near-sighted person does a page of print. Then suddenly she flung it out from her with violence.

"And mine"—she seemed to be making the discovery for the first time—"is yellow!"

In a moment her whole countenance had changed. Standing there, she seemed like the daughter of some savage old Tartar king resurrected from her tomb. Yet her fierceness was less like jealousy than the frenzied embracing of her own hateful fate. As once before long ago in Madame Ling's death chamber, hordes of strange, malicious spirits seemed to take form out of the elements and compass her about. Again she stretched out her arms to them:

"The gods have mocked me; I am yours now. Help me!"

The door opened and Sam Wang, like some grinning Chinese Mephistopheles stepped in.

BOOK II

**THE GREAT SWORD AND THE
RED LANTERN**

*“ We, the brothers of the Long Sword, will
lead the van ;
Our sisters of the Red Lantern will bring
up the rear guard.
Together, we will attack the barbarians,
and drive them into the Sea.”*

BOXER CHANT.

I

PEKING! Tarnished and stained old City! Thing of colossal bulwarks, of mammoth towers, of fantastic palaces and temples, of ancient trees and mysterious hidden gardens, of countless little grey huts—all blighted by the dust of two thousand years, scorched by the sun, smitten by the wind and the rain, flagellated by war, corroded, worm-eaten, decayed, falling everywhere into ruin.

Peking, whose very name is a spell! Who that saw the ancient Chinese Capital at the end of the century just past, can forget the splendour of her squalor? Barbaric old mother of millions, changed to the aspect of some filthy witch, yet, for all her weather-beaten rags and senile decrepitude, retaining something venerable and august—aye, wearing still a kind of glory, reminiscent of the fierce old Tartar days when the magnificence of the Mongol Khans with their resplendent palaces, painted in hot vermilion, and dazzling green and yellow, set all the world agog! Ser Marco Polo came to see her in these times, and departed amazed, proclaiming her gorgeous and honourable beyond compare. And if in these latter days she has fallen from that goodly renown, she has yet known how to turn her very dinginess into beauty, to make art of her rubbish heaps, so that under the spell of her sorcery, one may still believe oneself in the city of an Arabian Nights' tale.

Heaven knows! there are plenty of dragons about to give warrant to such an illusion—dragons on every hand, and monsters more inconceivable still. For all the ancient Buddhist forms of evil are here multiplied with persistent accuracy of detail; they leer at you from

steep old roofs and coppery walls, from the gilt-lace carvings of the shop-fronts, from the marble balustrades of crumbling old bridges; from bas-reliefs of battling chimæras on pagoda and tomb—yes, and from the very tea-cup you drink from, until you look to see if the sky itself is not about to rain down claws and horns and eyes!

The forms, colours, sounds, and smells of the city seem in Peking to be exaggerated, intensified to the point of fantasy: one has the impression of moving down the streets to the air of a capriccio. Reeking native scents assail the nostrils; the eternal dust which drifts into the city unceasingly from the Gobi Desert powders the lips with fine red grit; the ears are slaughtered by a constant din. Gongs beat, dogs yap; tinkers, peddlers, and cobblers give out the same trade calls which for centuries have seemed to mock the cries of hungry hyenas on scent over the steppes of Siberia. But it is most of all the eyes that are continually astonished. All the bizarre shapes and colours of the world seem to have gathered themselves together in the streets of Peking. Yet never is there a lack of harmony. In the dingiest alley, showing a tangled vista of broken doorways, sheds, and irregular painted balconies, there will suddenly flash out some marvellous picture worthy of a Rembrandt. It may be no more than a tinker, mending a jug with the curious tools of his trade, or a naked baby playing with his amulet in a streak of sunshine falling on him through the cleft of some old wall—the lines and the colouring are perfect.

In the great arteries of the city, the main thoroughfares are raised three feet or more from the level of the big shops, and are often edged for a mile with pawn bazaars. On the stands of these bazaars among much rubbish and filth, one catches, now and then, the green glimmer of jade, or the gleam of some matchless silk, or stops to examine admirable pieces of cloisonné

coming perhaps from some chill, abandoned old palace. Under tents patched in rags of a hundred shapes and colours, are the booths of sweetmeat vendors with wares so seductive to schoolboys. Blue-frocked squads of them pause to exchange a few tightly-clenched *cash* for a wistaria-blossom cake or some honeyed dates, and then pass on, reciting long passages from Confucius in sing-song monotone. Their classic tongues become especially glib as they scud by the wayside shrines where oily old priests with yellow skull-caps sit in dumb guard over squatting Buddhas. Safely past these sphinxes, they may flick mud-balls with renewed pleasure at the pigs and beggars huddled together in penned or open misery, or make grimaces at the dragons agape at the moon, painted in red and black on the sides of coffins, which, according to some immemorial custom, one must suppose, stand in the streets waiting their tenants like canal-barges in line before a lock.

These booths and bazaars make a street within the street. The big shops themselves, extending on a lower level and in a broader parallel, have entire façades of gilt-laced carving, tarnished by dust and age to dull copper tints which set into high relief their flaming sign-boards inscribed with huge scarlet and green characters. Inside, are the counters and shelves piled with rich merchandise, and the fat, grave merchants in long neutral-coloured tunics, who wear immense spectacles framed in tortoise-shell, and who count eternally on an abacus.

Animals and vehicles crowd the raised middle street or causeway between the two lines of tents and bazaars. Here are travelling litters from the provinces swung between belled and caparisoned mules, swaying rhythmically as they pass. Sometimes whole families travel in these huge suspended boxes—father, mother, and little ones, crowded in together with their bedding and other household effects. They are perhaps bound for

one of the seaport towns in the south, or they are making their way homeward to some remote province of the interior. It is pleasant to listen to their jangling bells, and follow in imagination their slow progress to the four corners of that vast empire which lies beyond the city walls. Less noisy than these mule-litters, are the long caravans of Mongolian camels and dromedaries, hooked together by the nose, which file past laden with merchandise, or bestridden by wild-looking men in sheepskins. Mammoth creatures, they are, furred thickly, with long brown hair falling over their shoulders and humps, and soft eyes like a Creole woman's. The great flat cushions of their feet sink into the black soil of the road so noiselessly that sometimes a whole train of them will loom up before a sound is heard, passing like huge spectres into the dust-veiled distance. In contrast to their great majestic hulks, are little donkeys almost crushed beneath the weight of rustic straddlers, toiling meekly along by the side of wheelbarrows and waggons, carrying rice, vegetables and fruit from the country. And in and out, everywhere, among the other vehicles, go the brisk, two-wheeled, blue-covered Pekingese carts, springless but serviceable, carrying their bourgeois passengers for a few *cash* to any point in the city.

At times, both animals and vehicles will suddenly line themselves up at the edge of the street to wait the passage of some stately mandarin in sedan-chair, guarded behind and before by outriders who lash right and left with long whips to clear the road for their peacock-feathered chief.

Or perhaps it is the mandarin's daughter who is taking the air. A small olive hand parts the heavy curtains of the litter ; a little head, with a girl's jewelled fillet across the brows, peers out ; an order is given to the chair-bearers ; they stop, and the silken draperies are held aside entirely for a moment in front of a street performances of marionettes. At some sprightly act of

the puppets, there is a fine glittering of almond eyes, a flash of white teeth between rouged lips, a girlish laugh ; then the curtains of the sedan drop and you are left to wonder over little Miss Pinched-Toes within.

In contrast with such pleasant vanity, a funeral procession advances to a dirge in minor key. Chanting priests beat gongs in slow cadence, groups of white-robed mourners, wailing and tearing their clothes, throw into the air tinsel money and burn in the middle of the street huge paper palaces for the soul of the dead to use in some sort of astral existence beyond the grave ; while beggarly venals bearing embroidered umbrellas and gold and crimson standards attend closely on the heels of the mourners. Last, through a cloud of dust and incense, comes the bier—gaunt, blood-red, enormous—carried heavily on the shoulders of men. In the same manner, a thousand years ago, the venerated ancestor of the dead went to his long home. And the ancestors of those yapping curs in the tail of the procession, yapped just so, no doubt, in the days of Kublai Khan ; and then, as now, the descendants of men treated them with toleration as the temporary dwelling-places of wicked ancestral souls on their way through countless æons of reincarnation to spheral Nirvana.

Such is Peking ! The brain is bewildered with a sense of life distorted, in the highest degree unreal. The fantastic palaces, pagodas, and temples, visible from a distance over the tops of gigantic walls, seem like dwellings of strange gods, loveless and removed, to whom all the children of the streets have become as grasshoppers.

II

It was the night of the Feast of Lanterns, held in honour of the first full moon of the Chinese New Year. By the Christian calendar, the date was the 14th of February, A.D. 1900. For a month past, according to the immemorial custom at the beginning of the year, old Cathay had turned to jubilation with an abandonment only completely realisable in a man's or nation's second childhood ; and now, on this night of the full moon, Peking was a city of illusions in the vacillation of a million coloured lanterns, whose lights mingled with the pale lunar rays.

The lanterns, made of paper, silk, cloth, glass, horn, basket-work, and bamboo, were of strange and beautiful forms, varying in size from the dimensions of a walnut to globes fifteen feet in diameter. Besides all the geometric figures, there were models of fishes, fowls, and reptiles, with eyes and tongues of flame ; and in more elaborate design, harbours and pavilions brilliantly illuminated from within, over whose elfin parapets leaned elegant little dolls—palace courtiers, fine ladies and dancing girls—all set in frantic motion by every gust of wind ; a feast of lanterns, indeed, as the marvelling Magaillans describes it, when “ You shall see horses run, draw chariots and till the earth ; vessels sailing, kings and princes go in and out with large trains, and great numbers of people both a-foot and a-horseback, armies marching, comedies, dances, and a thousand other diversissements and motions represented.” Ever and anon, one of the flimsy structures would blaze up, burn a few seconds, and go out in fine white smoke.

Through the rainbow blur of light emanating from

the myriad lanterns, the details of the streets and buildings were lost ; they became to the eye mere patches of colour, hallucination of form, against which faces and gesticulating hands appeared as wild silhouettes. And in imitation of the fantastic scene below, the sky itself, as the night descended, began to blaze with extravagant imaginings. Rockets raced to the zenith and burst into splendid temples and pagodas of flame, or formed themselves into shapes of gods and warriors riding mightily on chariots of fire. Once a rocket more brilliant than usual rose in feverish crescendo, broke above a certain great thoroughfare of the city, and hung for a full minute in space. It was the figure of the great Yellow Dragon of China, let loose, it would seem, by sudden magic from the bowls of the earth, to soar aloft an instant in the firmament where all the inhabitants of the Middle Kingdom might gaze at it and tremble. In each of its five talons was suspended a globe of light of differing hues—red, blue, orange, green and purple ; from its nostrils violet flames poured forth, and between its wide-open jaws hung a fiery moon ; the scales of its back were like a golden coat of mail, and its scarlet eyes were furious as those of a creature drunk with blood. The Chinese guttural broke into harsh delight at the splendid apparition, and thousands of upturned eyes watched until it paled and died in the sky. Then followed a confused hum of voices.

“ Where did it rise from ? ”

“ The Ha-Ta Gate. There’s a great magician there.”

“ Yes, a veritable wonder-worker. They say he’s one of the members of the I Ho Ch’uan who are going to kill off all the foreign devils in the country.”

“ A true patriot then ! Let’s go and see him.”

There were bursts of staccato laughter, the scuffling of thousands of feet, and the tide of human heads had set towards the enormous portal at the end of the street.

III

THE Ha-Ta Gate, terminus of the Ha-Ta Great Street, over which the yellow dragon had appeared, pierces at a point to the south-east the Tartar wall that divides the Chinese and the Manchu cities. It is one of the most colossal of the many colossal gateways in the stupendous black ramparts of Peking. The gate is a deadly thing, with double tunnel-like arches surmounted by mammoth towers above a gaunt enclosing wall. The large quadrangular space between the double openings is the nightly rendezvous of scores of scurvy beggars shivering in their blue cotton rags; while perched above them, along the wall, and on the fantastic curved roofs of the big towers, multitudes of crows made the air hideous with their cawing.

But on this night of the Feast of Lanterns, the scene was far more brilliant. Already the square was filled with a throng of Celestials in gala dress and spirits, and more were continually crowding in from the street beyond. Here, as elsewhere, thousands of lanterns gleamed in mid-air; so many, indeed, as to form almost a complete canopy of light above the heads of the people.

The centre of this luminous canopy was directly above a platform which had been raised in the middle of the square. The lanterns, which were strung on ropes stretched across from tower to tower, and from the angles of the enclosing wall, merged here in a glowing nebula which cast a myriad coloured rays upon the face and figure of the man who stood on the platform.

He looked like one of those uncouth genii of Old

Asia that are said still to lurk in company with the Old Man of the Mountains in the fastnesses of inaccessible ranges. His features were grotesquely large of an almost pure Mongolian cast ; his frame was unusually powerful, the hands and feet enormous. From under the close-fitting round hat of the middle class native, a long black queue hung down his back. In front of him, rapid spirals of red smoke turned and twisted upward from a large bronze censer, writhing under the galaxy of lanterns, and along the edge of the platform among squat images of antique war divinities set there in a row, enveloping with sinuous wreaths the man in the centre, and coiling like a serpent about the bottles and glasses containing chemicals which littered a table beside him.

Below him, the people were packing themselves into an almost impenetrable mass ; hundreds were squatted along the enclosing wall of the square ; even the roofs were tufted with human heads. Under the influence of the man's voice, those who had come to see a "jenao," a mere frolic of the holiday season, were rapidly catching the contagion of his hate.

"Hear, now, the sacred Edict, issued by the Lord of Wealth and Happiness," he cried in a loud voice, and as silence fell upon the people, he read from a huge placard, intoning the phrases sonorously :

"The Catholic and Protestant religions being insolent to the gods, and extinguishing sanctity, rendering no obedience to Buddha, and enraging Heaven and Earth, the rain-clouds no longer visit us ; but eight million spirit soldiers will descend from Heaven and sweep the Empire clean of all foreigners. Then will the gentle showers once more water our lands ; and when the tread of soldiers and the clash of steel are heard heralding woes to all our people, then the Buddhist Patriotic League of Boxers will be able to protect the Empire and to bring peace to all its people."

"The Patriotic League of Boxers! Sweep the Empire clean of foreigners!" echoed the crowd as if giving the response to a litany.

The man stepped to the edge of the platform and continued the recitative.

"Hasten, then," he cried, "to spread this doctrine far and wide, for if you gain one adherent to the faith your own person will be absolved from all future misfortunes. If you gain five adherents your whole family will be absolved from all evils, and if you gain ten adherents your whole village (or neighbourhood) will be absolved from all calamities. Those who gain no adherents to the cause shall be decapitated, for until all foreigners have been exterminated the rain can never visit us. Those who have been so unfortunate as to have drunk water from wells poisoned by foreigners should at once make use of the following Divine Prescription, the ingredients of which are to be decocted and swallowed, when the poisoned patient will recover :

*Dried black plums, half an ounce,
Solanum dulcamara, half an ounce,
Liquorice root, half an ounce."*

There was an indescribable buzzing of voices repeating, "Liquorice, half an ounce; solanum dulcamara, half an ounce; dried plums, half an ounce,"—each item emphasised by curses against the "foreign devils who poison the wells." The man on the platform suddenly averted his face, and the gods, no doubt, saw his smile. But when he turned again no trace of it remained. He took up a second "Edict" and read from it.

"Foreign devils come with their teaching, and converts to Christianity, Roman Catholic and Protestant, have become numerous. These churches are without human relations, but being most cunning have attracted all the greedy and covetous as converts, and to an unlimited degree they have practised oppression, until

every good official has been corrupted, and, covetous of foreign wealth has become their servant; so telegraphs have been established, foreign rifles and guns have been manufactured, and machine-shops have been a delight to their evil nature. Locomotives, balloons, electric lamps, the foreign devils think excellent. Though these foreigners ride in sedans unbefitting their rank, China yet regards them as barbarians of whom God disapproved, and He is sending down spirits and genii for their destruction."

"Sha! Sha!" (kill! kill!) cried the people.

A big fellow rose from the wall, and balancing himself perilously, shouted: "We will make you our leader!"

The speaker smiled and bowed in his direction, then continued:

"The first of these powers which has already descended is the Light of the Red Lamp and the Volunteer Associated Fists who will have a fight with the devils. They will burn down the foreign buildings and restore the temples. Foreign goods of every variety they will destroy. They will extirpate the evil demons, and establish right teaching—the honour of the spirits and the sages: they will cause their sacred teaching to flourish. The purpose of Heaven is fixed. A clean sweep is to be made."

Again the crowd echoed: "A clean sweep is to be made. Sha! Sha! (kill! kill!) Shao! Shao! (burn! burn!)" Pig-tailed heads wagged angrily: oblique black eyes glistened in the iridescent murk.

The countenance of the speaker suddenly became wrapt. With a violent gesture, he pulled open his tunic and revealed the red sash of the I Ho Ch'uan, and catching up a great sword, whirled it above his head.

"I am a Boxer!" he cried aloud, "and the Great Fairy has made me invulnerable. That you may believe

what I say, I will now conjure Him to appear from this censer, and in His presence I will swallow this sword. If in the trial, a drop of blood be spilled from my body, let all the multitude rush forward and put me to death."

There was a joyous roar. "The Great Fairy of the I Ho Ch'uan is going to appear!"

The man took two bottles from the table and poured their contents simultaneously into the censer. Instantly he was surrounded by high lurid flames. From them his voice came in weird incantation:

"Imperial Heaven, Revered Ancients, The Cave of the Five Buddhas A Mi T'o Fo, upper eight genii, middle eight, lower eight, A Mi T'o Fo, come and instruct me, A Mi T'o Fo, Honourable Ruler of Heaven, come and instruct me, A Mi T'o Fo—Holy Mother of the three Genii, T'ang Sêng, Sha Sêng, Pa Chieh, Wu K'ung, I do not know which reverent Teacher will visit my humble place."

He dropped a fire cracker into the flames. "Great Fairy! quickly come at my command!"

There was a loud explosion. Then from the censer issued a shape which grew larger and larger until it stood superhuman before magician and people. The colour of it was blood-red; and its habiliments were those of a warrior; in one mighty hand, it upheld a great sword like those used by the Boxers; the other formed itself into a terrible fist which seemed to menace destruction.

"The Great Fairy! The Great Fairy!" the cry went up again and again. The spectacle was, indeed, one to throw into a frenzy of delight these true Children of the East whose colossal naïveté is matched only by their credulity.

"Now swallow the sword for us in his presence!"

In the midst of the shouting, the red sedan of a high mandarin was borne through the throng. At the com-

mand of its occupant, the chair-bearers halted several feet from the platform just as the magician lifted the sword to his mouth.

"A Mi T'o Fo," he said thrice, prostrating himself each time before the flaming image; at the last repetition, the enormous blade disappeared down his throat! Then, slowly he drew it out unstained, and when the sanguine Fairy had vanished, stood smiling before the people.

They cheered him vociferously, and cried out for another miracle. But before he had time to reply, two men burst through the crowd and came straight towards the platform. These men, though dressed in the dirty sheepskins of Mongols from the northern steppes, conformed neither in physiognomy nor in manner to a pure Asiatic type. They were without queues, and were somewhat lighter in complexion than the Chinese about them. When they had come to the edge of the platform, the magician bent eagerly over it.

"When?" he asked, not waiting for them to speak.

"In less than two minutes."

"Good."

He straightened himself and addressed the people.

"You desire another sign, and you shall have one," he said, "for you show yourselves to be true and loyal, ready to uphold the Patriotic League of Boxers when they shall come a few months hence to destroy the accursed foreigner."

"Yes! yes!—to destroy the accursed foreigner!" the litany continued.

"For this reason," resumed the magician, smiling again, "the Goddess of the Red Lantern Light, the greatest female divinity of our Holy League, has graciously vouchsafed to show herself this night. Watch now through the gate as I speak the words of the divine incantation and you will see her approach."

He turned on the platform until he was directly

facing the enormous tunnel-like opening which led into the city. Every head in the crowd turned with his.

"Oh, hear," he cried, his voice falling into a rhythmic chant, "the instructions from the God Mi T'o to his disciples—proclaiming upon every mountain by the Ancient Teachers—reverently inviting the Gods from the Central Southern Mountain, from the Central Eight Caves—to preserve China and destroy foreigners. The Iron Lo Han, if cut with knife or chopped with axe, there will be no trace. Cannon cannot injure, water cannot drown. If I urgently invite the gods, they will quickly come, if I tardily invite them they will tardily come—from their seats in every mountain cave; Ancient Teachers, Venerable Mother, do quickly as I command.—Let the Goddess of the Red Lantern Light now appear!"

As he ended, he stretched out his arm over the crowd, now changed to a motionless mass, and pointed through the gate at a vision.

Beyond it, down the Ha-Ta Great Street, swept a wild band of female forms, clad entirely in red—red tunics, red shoes on their feet, red cloths wound about their heads, red banners in their hands which they uplifted towards a tall central figure borne in an open red palanquin. The troop advanced swiftly with an indescribable rhythm—lithe bodies swinging in unison with a weird chant in minor key, arms brandishing swords and spears, as if in a frenzied desire to fight. As they came nearer, it could be seen that the figures were those of young girls between the ages of ten and twenty, let loose in the streets at night in defiance of all the recognised proprieties of the Middle Kingdom.

For a moment the colossal gate held them; then they emerged abruptly into the square, and at the same instant their divinity loomed into full view. Arrayed in scarlet, with ebony-black hair forming a braided cowl

about her head, and heavy oval lids downcast as one in a hypnotic trance, she sat rigid as a gilded idol. In the right hand she held a great sword; in the left she upbore an enormous red lantern like a bloody sun which sets before a tempest. And suddenly, coming under the full rays of the million overhanging lights, she blazed into a thing of scintillating iridescent flame.

A long awed murmur broke from the multitude. Even for a people ready to see new divinities rise from the very rice and fish of life, this was an astonishing apparition. Slowly the great undulating sea of blue tunics parted to let the palanquin pass to the platform. Then a prolonged shout of ecstasy arose.

"Hung Têng Chou! Hung Têng Chou! (Red Lantern Light.)"

"Goddess of the Red Lantern Light!" The shout went up everywhere.

The palanquin was lifted upon the platform and set facing the people, the red-robed girls grouping themselves about it. The magician made a low obeisance to the straight seated figure; then waved his hand to the crowd.

"Our Goddess will now receive the oath of allegiance from those who desire to become leaders in the Buddhist Patriotic League of Boxers," he cried. Immediately, as if by prearrangement, a dozen men mounted the platform and formed a circle about the palanquin. Among them were the two men in sheepskins.

When they were in their places, the magician raised the Great Sword of the Boxers. At the signal, the twelve candidates for leadership opened their tunics, as the juggler had previously done, and displayed the red sash of the I Ho Ch'uan; at a second signal, they dropped to their knees and kowtowed three times before the rigid figure in the palanquin. At the same time the maidens knelt, extending sticks of burning incense, and still chanting their hymn in minor key. Only the

magician remained standing with his eyes fixed on the divinity's face.

Up to this moment, the Goddess had shown no more life than a graven image. But suddenly a shudder passed through her: then slowly, as if in obedience to some hypnotic spell, she arose, and, stepping out of the sedan with the Great Sword and Red Lantern still uplifted in her hands, spoke in a distinct and level voice. The chanting of the girls and the murmurs of the crowd sank to silence.

"I, the Goddess of the Red Lantern Light, called from my home in the Eight Central Caves, from the Central Southern Mountain, do quickly hasten at the words of the divine incantation to preserve China and destroy foreigners. And with me I bring mortal maidens, whom I have endued with power to ride upon the clouds, and point out the dwelling-places of the foreign demons and their friends. From the clouds, they shall kindle fires which shall harm none but those proscribed. From the clouds, they shall cause the iron battleships of the enemy to burn like tinder. Let those who desire proof, fix their gaze attentively upon the sun at its setting; then wherever the eye turns, shall be seen the magic light of the Red Lantern whose power shall conquer the foreigners." She paused; then continued in a louder voice:

"Those who would now become leaders in the divine Society of the Great Sword, shall take the oath of allegiance before me."

At once, the twelve men joined hands, and spoke in chorus as in a sort of chant.

"By Imperial Heaven, by the Revered Ancients, by the Cave of the Five Buddhas, A Mi T'o Fo, we swear to protect the Empire and exterminate foreigners." Again they kowtowed thrice.

The Goddess stepped back to the palanquin, whence, enthroned, she distributed twelve great swords to the

maidens in red, who in turn placed them in the hands of the newly-sworn braves as they arose from their knees. Then with the eyes of the magician still riveted upon her, she raised aloft her Great Sword and Lantern, and spoke in a loud voice, yet as if under some strange compulsion.

"Hear now in turn, O Warriors, the oath of thy Goddess. By the sacred head of my father, Kwanti, seated upon the Central Southern Mountain, I do swear to lead you to victory and drive every foreigner in China into the sea. And if I fail, then shall I become a mortal and die by my own hand; for such is the will the gods."

As she ended, her heavy lids lifted and the blue eyes of the Goddess met the gaze of the magician. Then at his order, before the silent throng, the palanquin was raised by the red-robed girls: and waving his hand to signify that the ceremony was over, he jumped upon a horse which had been tethered to the platform and rode after the Divinity. As they passed out of the gate into the city, the suspense of the people broke, and a great shouting followed.

"Hung Têng Chou! Hung Têng Chou! Ride upon the clouds, girls! Kill the foreign devils for us! Burn down their houses! Set fire to their ships. Prove the power of the Magic Red Lantern! Sha! Sha! Shao! Shao!"

The two men in sheepskins, still standing on the platform, stared after the retreating figures. The face of one, a young giant with reddish hair, darkened as he turned to his companion and spoke in English:

"Did you see her face? My God! What a mask! And his eyes—they're on fire for her! I'm going to follow," he suddenly announced.

But his companion put a detaining hand on him.

"Wait, here comes somebody."

It was one of the chair-bearers of the mandarin in

the red sedan, who said that his master wished to speak with them.

When they were by the sedan, the mandarin leaned out, placed two taels of silver in the hand of each, at the same time giving them a long slip of red paper—his visiting card—upon which was a name and an address.

“Follow,” he said pointing after the palanquin, “and bring the girl to my house to-night.”

The men glanced at the card, started, bowed low, and in an instant more were lost in the luminous blur of the night.

IV

It was nearing midnight. The palanquin of the Goddess of the Red Lantern Light stood empty in a small court off East Bell Street. The red-robed girls had scattered to their homes. In her room next to the dispensary, Mahlee was alone with Sam Wang.

On entering, the girl had lighted a lamp and called aloud for Huang-ma. There had been no response; she had renewed her calling and, lamp in hand, had searched in a sort of panic all the rooms off the courtyard. But her efforts had been fruitless, and something in Wang's expression made her sure that he was responsible for the old servant's absence at this late hour. She tried to hide her nervousness but her heart beat thickly with a premonition that at last the issue between them had come.

He had seated himself without invitation, removing his Chinese hat with his attachment of false queue which he had worn as magician, and leaning his arms indolently upon a table; but the jet-like brightness of his eyes as they rested upon her, belied the slothfulness of his attitude. It gave him the aspect of a big crouching animal, waiting the moment for the forward spring.

She spoke as lightly as she could, affecting the Occidental woman of the world, in strange contrast with her recent rôle.

"Thank you, Dr. Wang, for your escort back. I am glad you liked my 'interpretation,' as Miss Sackville would call it, of the Boxer Goddess. Do you think I might succeed on the stage in Europe or America?" Her tone assumed a playfulness which she was far from feeling. "But," she added with a strained smile, with-

out waiting for an answer, "*you* are responsible for my success to-night. I believe you hypnotised me, for otherwise I should never have had the courage to go through my part. It has been a good night's work. But you must be tired now and in need of sleep. Huang-ma, no doubt, went to see the lanterns and has found someone in the street to gossip with; but I am sure she will be back in a few minutes, and meanwhile, I am not in the least afraid to be alone."

She made the slightest possible inclination of her head towards the door, as if he might now be permitted to depart. As he did not move, but continued to gaze at her she repeated with visible agitation, "You must be very tired. Please do not think it necessary to stay with me. Huang-ma is sure to be in at any moment now, and I shall not be afraid alone."

She knew that she was making it more and more evident at each word, that she *was* afraid of being with him. How her airs of *grande dame*, so natural before others, and so imposing, too, vanished before this man, leaving her to feel how really weak she was! He smiled—as she was sure he would—the gleam of ironic humour seeming to slide obliquely down his eyes and settle in their corners.

"I am not tired," he said. "And Huang-ma is not coming back to-night."

"Not coming back!" she echoed, feeling with a tightening of the throat that her conjecture had been correct, and that the dreaded thing was upon her. She started up. "Then I must go at once to the mission," she said emphatically, "for I dare not stay here alone."

She was heedless of the fact that she was giving the lie to her former words and began to make hurried movements in preparation for going out again. Mechanically she seized upon hat and gloves and announced herself as ready.

"Will you go to the mission in that dress?" asked Sam Wang, smiling again, and still remaining in his seat.

Her eyes fell upon her red habiliments, and she laughed with a pretence of gaiety.

"Oh, I'd forgotten! I wonder if Mrs. Parmelee would find them 'stylish.' But, of course, I must change. Will you excuse me for a few moments?" She was going towards an inner room, when he rose and placed his big frame between her and the door.

"Mahlee, you will stay here to-night, and I will bear you company."

For a moment, his masterfulness almost subdued her. If she had not felt his hot breath upon her, she might have taken his words as the promise of a strong man to protect a lonely woman. Indeed, when she found wit enough to answer, she assumed that to be their meaning.

"I am grateful to you," she said quietly, controlling her fear, "but I think it will be best to go to the mission."

He suddenly burst out laughing. "Go to the mission!" he cried, in the mocking tone she knew. "Are you quite daft, girl?"

As she stood speechless before him, he repeated, though more gently, "Are you mad, child? Don't you realise that after to-night's performance, you've burnt your ships behind you—turned your back for ever on your old life, that the Ark of the Covenant Mission and all its holy inmates must be for you henceforth as if they had never existed? Your only home now is with me."

The note of triumph in his last words was mingled with an accent of true feeling. He opened his huge arms to her as if he would invite, rather than compel, her to come to him.

But she remained motionless. For, as he spoke, a

sudden chasm seemed to open before her—a deep unbridgeable gulf parting her from her past. And there on its brink the revenge which she had so eagerly planned and begun to execute that night against Andrew Handel—against her father's race—seemed all at once to have turned against herself like some inexorable fury. She remembered her lately sworn oath taken under the hypnotic influence of Sam Wang's eyes. She saw now the broad expanse of his yellow face bent towards her, his uncouth arms stretched out to her—his words still sounded in her ears: "You have burnt your ships behind you. . . . Your only home now is with me."

A sob of terror formed in her throat, but she choked it back and continued motionless. Indeed, her stillness was so absolute that it acted upon him as an indefinable check which kept his arms extended like petrified things without immediate power to close about her. Was it her brooding stare—lids high uplifted, irides showing pale blue in the lamp-light from under the thick massed braids—which held him in a sort of spell? Or the helplessness, the hint of frailty in the slender scarlet-robed form which touched within him some obscure barbaric chivalry, and made him hold off for a moment?

"Girl! Girl!" he burst out at last in thick guttural, the sweat breaking from all the pores of his big face at once. "Do you know what it is to roll and toss on your bed night after night with your blood boiling in your arteries, your head in flames, your teeth gnawing your hands until they're raw?—or to get up and walk leagues at midnight in the Peking streets, devoured by a hunger so ravening, a thirst so unquenchable that the very beggars and scavenger-dogs pity you? No!" he cried. "You do not know, you cannot guess. Yet this, and infinitely more, you have made me suffer: for my hunger, my thirst, the daily and nightly fever of

my flesh and my blood—yes, and of my soul, for I, too, have a soul—are for you. *You, you,*” he repeated in a tone which was almost menacing. “Do you understand?”

He came nearer, and she believed that now inevitably his arms must lock her in. With the anticipation, so sick a trembling seized her that she felt that she would fall. But to her amazement, he suddenly crouched at her knees.

“Love me, love me,” he whined, his yellow face taking on an almost haggard aspect, his small oblique eyes filling with tears, the first perhaps of his life. “If you knew how the thought of you has possessed me for months—how, everywhere—always—I am haunted by your little face in its black hood of hair, your strange eyes, your golden skin, the white gleam of your teeth between your red lips! Always—everywhere—until you have become a frenzy, a madness, an insatiable desire.”

He held up towards her great quivering hands, but his voice grew stronger in his pleading.

“Mahlee! Mahlee! We were born for each other! What can your frigid sickly-faced ascetic understand of your charm? No, the West has repudiated you as it has me, but to-night, as true children of the East we have begun our revenge together, nor shall we stop until we have purged our *mother-land* from the accursed race of our fathers. Yes, yes, you were born for me, girl. Are we not of the same despised breed? Who else can understand you as I do? Your sufferings, your moods, even your music, I recognise, I know, for they are all my own. The very odour of our two bodies is alike. I catch it from you now, and it maddens me. Yet something, I know not what, makes me beg for that which I could so easily take. Tell me once, once only that you love me and I am your slave.”

But the word brought him suddenly to his feet!

"Slave!" he cried. "Think of it! I, Sam Wang, *your* slave." He stressed the pronoun with almost insolent violence. "*You*, a frail weak thing, hold *me* in bondage. Just look at me!—these hands,"—he spread them menacingly toward her—"these feet," he pointed down at them—"I could crush you as easily as a snail's shell, I could trample you to powder. Yet I beg from you like a dog; for a word of love, I am your bond servant."

He was so close now that his breath scorched her face. His eyes at once threatened and besought her. Then, suddenly, as she stood there, she saw them fill again, and the tears overflowing, run down his broad flat cheeks. "Love me! love me!" he whispered hoarsely once more.

At the spectacle of him thus she felt the tension of her nerves breaking. He seemed to her like some gargoyle, some monstrous grotesque in love. But with a supreme effort she achieved a tone of languid amusement as of a great lady looking on at a farce.

"Bravo! Dr. Wang," and her lip curled ever so slightly. "'The play's the thing.'"

It was a fatal note. For an instant he remained as if he had been turned to stone. Then, very deliberately, he stretched his frame to its full height and squared himself above her. His face was redoubtable. All the Oriental's contempt for woman leered from his slant eyes. He opened the door into the inner chamber, and when he spoke his tone was that of a Chinese master to a rebellious concubine.

"Go in there," he said peremptorily.

She swayed from him like a flame in her red dress—a pure, vivid thing, defying pollution. Yet all that she could gasp out was a "No! No!"

"No!" he cried, snatching the long false queue from his hat on the table, and curling it like a whip above her. "No, did you say? Perhaps we must drive you in then."

She heard the thing whistle in the air, bowed her back for its descent; then felt a sudden draught from an opening door, and before she could see where they came from, knew that two men had closed with Sam Wang. There was a fierce struggle, guttural cries of rage, the smell of sheepskin and human sweat, then the heavy thud of Wang's body against the floor. She saw one of the men strike him repeatedly on the head with the butt end of a revolver, while the other bound his arms and legs. A moment more, and Wang lay a huge quivering mass entirely unconscious.

The room began to reel before her, yet she did not fall. She knew that the lamp was extinguished, that she was led out by the two men and placed on the abandoned litter. The taller of the men threw off his great cloak of sheepskin and wrapped it about her, and she heard him say in English:

"Pick up your end, Chung," and the other answer, "Heave ahead, Sing."

Then they bore her into the deserted streets.

V

THE miasmatic stench of Peking, which at that period were almost unendurably foul after sundown, enveloped her. Darkness and pollution, within and without, possessed her, absorbed her. She felt as if she had sunk into some corrupt bog where the most desperate efforts she could make to free herself but served to engulf her more profoundly. The thousands of lanterns which she passed, with their candles now flickering in their sockets and emitting the strong odour of burning grease, seemed like the unwholesome gleams on the foetid surface of her quagmire. The guttural cries to each other in the dark, of some belated holiday-makers departing at last for their homes, were to her ears as the hoarse croaking of monstrous frogs. And everywhere, like some hideous black snake suspended from a tree and stiffening itself to strike, she saw the false queue of Sam Wang!

She sat in the palanquin, not daring to lift her head from where it had sunk between the folds of the dirty sheepskin cloak, lest the thing should descend upon her. Her whole soul was sick with abasement and loathing; her loneliness appalled her. Then suddenly like a ghostly moon over her bog, swam the face of Andrew Handel. Pure, unattainable, it seemed to float fathoms high above her in the empyrean. . . . Lofty pallid brow shaded by ash-blond air, eyes pale as opals, yet with the same fluctuating fire in them, lips drawn fine as a scarlet thread. . . . She stretched her arms up to it in her great need. "Andrew! Andrew!" she cried in a voice almost extinct, as one drowning who calls for succour.

But beautiful, merciless, it floated still higher, until like the dimmest of wraiths it had utterly vanished. Then suddenly she broke into peal after peal of self-mocking laughter. Her chair-bearers, alarmed, stopped the palanquin and ran to her.

"Go on!" she commanded in a loud hard voice, and laughed again immoderately. Perceiving that her nerves had been unstrung by the late scene, the men silently picked up the litter again and continued the route.

It was nearly dawn when they stopped at last before an immense iron-clamped gate and demanded entrance in the name of Jung Lu, General-in-chief of the Manchu Imperial Army.

VI

THE great Mandarin summoned Mahlee into his presence the next morning. She had spent the few hours which remained of the preceding night with one of the tiring-women belonging to the rich house, who had been waiting at the gate for her arrival, and had taken her at once into the women's court. Her great fatigue had finally overcome her, and she had slept. On awakening, she had been bathed by the tiring-woman, anointed with perfumed oils, and arrayed in a robe of dull blue silk embroidered about the sleeves and hem. Her feet had been encased in satin shoes with the high stilt-like central heel worn by Manchus, and her fine ears hung with pendants of gold and jade. The woman had even begun to arrange Mahlee's hair in the Manchu coiffure, but the girl, up to this time passive under her hands, now objected, and standing before a mirror, deftly put back her locks into their usual Egyptian-looking braids, from which black, glossy tendrils escaped about her forehead and temples.

Her passivity at this moment was not a pose. She had been dazed by the quick change of scene from the night before, and what she now experienced was less a new feeling than the mere cessation of immediate fear which follows escape from one peril before another is realised. After her futile cry for succour, had she not commanded to be taken *on*?

On!—whither? She knew not. She only knew that she could never go back,—that a great gulf was fixed between to-day and all her yesterdays. It was the gulf of which Sam Wang had once spoken, and which she had felt yawning before her when he opened his hateful

arms to her,—that mighty chasm, deeper and wider than any sea, which divides the Occidental from the Oriental. She had now joined her ancestors on its Eastern brink and she could never more return.

Even her revenge was not merely her own. No! it was that of race, of her mother's race, upon her father's—the vengeance of old China upon the insolent young Europe. Again she recalled her vow. She must now learn to think of herself as entirely Chinese, consecrated to free her country from the oppression of the stranger. Even Sam Wang's insults could not make it right to retract from that. And if she did retract, to whom could she go? Would Andrew Handel receive her to-day with more love than he had shown yesterday? Again she burst into her mocking laugh. . . . Ah, well,—was not vengeance called sweet? True, its first taste had been a witches' brew on her lips, but whether sweet or bitter she could not put aside the cup now; she must drain it to the lees.

Facing that necessity, her spirits suddenly rose. She learned by questioning the tiring-woman, that she was in the house of the most powerful military commander in China. Already she knew well Jung Lu's name and fame, and at the thought of them now her heart beat with a quickened interest. Yet she did not blind herself to his probable purpose in bringing her there. Her beauty, she guessed, might in its very exotic piquancy, make a peculiar appeal to a Chinese general.

But the element of danger in her present position began to fascinate her. Indeed, by a sort of reaction, she was soon disposed to take almost whimsically these new circumstances into which she found herself so abruptly plunged. A certain worldly wisdom—something deeply latent in her, pointing back, it almost seemed, to a definite heritage, rather than to what might have been bred by any direct personal experience,—came now to her aid. Even the remembrance of the previous

night did not rob her of confidence; it would be no second Sam Wang she would be called upon to handle here. For Jung Lu, she had learned, was almost an old man, and old men even in great positions were subject to delicate leading by clever women. She felt that to lead the great Manchu so, would be a game worthy of her powers,—a game where her grand air would prove her most effective defence. Her old boast to Mrs. Templeton came again to her mind as she saw herself reflected sumptuously in a mirror. "One day I shall be a great *tai-tai* (lady), a very great *tai-tai*." Here was a chance to play her favourite rôle.

For a moment, indeed, she was touched to a wistful yearning for some larger and truer reality than that which any mere game or rôle could afford her. If her whole heart had been in the Cause, how wonderful could she make this hour! Seizing its opportunity, how she could become, to a degree not yet dreamed of, the Inspiring Vision of her countrymen.

In truth, only by some such large hope, had she successfully sustained her first jealous fury for revenge during the six weeks at the East Bell Street Dispensary preceding her spectacular appearance at the Ha-Ta Gate. Sam Wang had shown remarkable statescraft during that period. After the crisis in Andrew Handel's study, he had never referred again to her own, or even to his personal grievances against the white race; instead, with detailed insistence—bringing her maps and reading her histories—he had dwelt upon the great general justice on the Chinese side, and the abominable lack of it on the other; until, with marvellous force and power, he had led her to see all from the native point of view, and made her in the end, complete master of the Chinese military motives and passions. Certainly the task had not been difficult with one so well prepared for the teaching as Mahlee. And it is not strange that on the strength of it she had been able to train her maidens and lead them

out the evening before in her mystical debut. Only the night's hideous sequel had revealed her weakness,—had all but quenched the new fire of “patriotism” in her.

Yet now as the tiring-woman clasped upon her wrists some heavy gold bracelets, Mahlee recognised that in her present position in Jung Lu's palace, a clinging to patriotism would be her only chance for salvation. Without waiting for any more complete restoration, therefore, she gathered up the shreds of it with a brave smile.

When the formalities of her toilet had been completed and she was brought into the great man's presence, her self-possession was perfect. For she counted before the interview was ended upon having changed her host's mind, and this moreover, without any direct appeal.

The mandarin received her in a fine room rich in lacquers and carved teak-wood. He was dressed in silk robes in pale tones of lavender, heavily embroidered over the breast with the emblematic dragon, and saturated with some excessive perfume, as of musk; on his head was the Manchu official hat adorned with the button and peacock feathers of his exalted rank. The strong Mongolian features of the man were not without a certain virile beauty in spite of the prominent cheek bones and divergent eyes. It was a face indicative of vigour and astuteness—the astuteness of the Chinese, which based upon craft and a talent for indirection, is yet often mingled with a large measure of naïveté. He was seated in a square armchair before a table, upon which was spread a large map. This he seemed to be examining with great attention, but upon Mahlee's entrance with the tiring-woman, he looked up immediately; seeing the girl's composure, he himself appeared somewhat embarrassed. His first word was to the attendant.

"You may go," he said.

Upon the woman's withdrawal, he pointed to a second armchair opposite his own.

"Deign to sit down," he said laconically. He was experiencing a certain difficulty in catching the exact tone required by Chinese etiquette in dealing with a goddess whom he coveted for his harem. But the goddess proved a charming *femme du monde*. Seating herself, she smiled at him graciously, as if she were the hostess and he the guest.

"Your honourable clothes are very handsome," she remarked, to put him entirely at his ease. "Their cost must have been enormous."

His face showed first surprise, then candid pleasure. He was glad to find that the goddess had a tongue in her head.

"They are worthless rags," he said, "for which I paid but a trifling sum: yet in these agitated times, they are the best I can afford."

"The times are, indeed, agitated and are likely to become more so," Mahlee agreed in a courteous conversational tone. "The position of your excellency must be a difficult one."

"Extremely so; yet I suppose I have no reason for complaint, since they say: 'The higher the rat creeps up the cow's horn the narrower he finds it.'"

"Yes," said Mahlee, smiling amiably again, "and at the tip of the horn where your excellency now stands, there can be only room for one. Yet with so great a patroness as her majesty, the Empress Dowager, your honour need never have the fear of being superseded."

He returned her smile, flattered in spite of himself by this curious unknown being. Although incredulous as to her divine origin, he found her no less a distinct puzzle. Who, indeed, was she to talk with him, the *Ta jén*,—the "great man," with so much ease and intelligence,

yet without the slightest suggestion of immodesty. For him she was an entirely new type of female, by no means sufficiently explained by her title of Boxer Goddess. With the exception of the Empress Dowager, he had scarcely ever spoken with a clever woman. He would like to have questioned her about herself, but some new sense of delicacy with which she imbued him—a sense quite foreign to the Chinese code of politeness—kept his curiosity in check, and prevented him, likewise, from making any allusion to the events of the preceding night.

“So you know me?” he finally asked.

“Who in our Middle Kingdom does not know the great general, Jung Lu?” was her suave reply.

He smiled again, yet appeared not quite satisfied. The reason for his discontent soon became apparent.

“But,” he said, “there have been greater generals than I who became known beyond their own countries. In America, there once lived a *Ta jén* called Georga Washington. (His pronunciation of the name was inimitable!) Did you even hear of him?”

Mahlee laughed. “Yes, and of his cherry-tree.”

“His cherry-tree?”

She told the anecdote in a few words, eliciting a hearty laugh from her host, who in exchange recounted the wisdom of the young sage, Mencius. But he returned almost immediately to the world-wide fame of George Washington, of which he was plainly jealous.

“Even you, who are a woman, have heard of him,” he said almost wistfully.

“And yet your excellency’s fame will soon be greater,” she replied with conviction.

He looked at her with shrewd eagerness.

“Be pleased, Kuniang, to lay bare your subtlety.”

She swept her hand towards the map on the table. “Your excellency has a map which I surmise is intended to show the widespread development of the new and

great society called the I Ho Ch'uan." Her tone was as impersonal as if she herself had no connection with the cult.

He nodded, and she continued.

"Do I paint a snake and add legs when I say that through its influence already more than twenty counties in the provinces of Shantung and Chihli are in a blaze of patriotic zeal, and that soon the whole country from the Yellow River to the Great Wall will be caught by the same ardour?"

Again his shrewd eyes were bent upon her.

"No, you do not exaggerate; that is the truth."

"And," she went on, "is not this great uprising directed against the foreigners who are represented in this city by the ambassadors of eleven distinct nations?"

"Yes," he said, "its purpose is to exterminate all the foreign devils in China. Their greed and violence in seizing upon our land, and their pernicious practices and sacrilege towards the gods are arousing infinite indignation. And now everybody is cursing them for the long drought—that which is proving a great help in the cause."

"And the Dragon Throne, now that it is no longer occupied by the feeble Kuang Hsü, but by our mighty Empress, will uphold the Boxers, will it not?" Mahlee queried again.

His eyes glittered craftily. "That is still a state secret, but since you seem to be a patroness of the cult, I may tell you that Her Majesty already regards them as the hope of the nation. All the Imperial Edicts remain necessarily ambiguous in their wording. Yet those who run may read that she is at heart a friend to the Boxers."

"And are there not countless thousands of these noble patriots?"

"Thousands, who will soon be multiplied into millions."

"The Empress has appointed your excellency general-in-chief of her entire army, I believe?"

He looked slightly surprised at the needlessness of the question, but answered it humbly.

"Such, Kuniang, is my despicable position."

"Then," she said, as if giving the *quod erat demonstrandum* of a problem in Euclid, "with the Throne and the people at your back, it will not be long before your excellency will have swept the country clean of eleven different races of barbarians. How much more glorious, therefore, will be the fame you will have achieved than that of George Washington, who was only a barbarian himself, and chased from his land but a single tribe of savages who had once been his own countrymen."

He looked at her with naïvely delighted eyes that held not the smallest idea that she was laughing at him.

"Kuniang," he said, "I perceive that you are a fine logician. State duties call me at present, but I shall wish to talk with you again. Meanwhile I humbly beg you to remain in my wretched house as the guest of my first stupid thorn."

By this delicate epithet he signified his head wife, who, upon the vigorous clapping of his hands, made her appearance in company with half a dozen handmaids. He instructed her to treat the new lady with profound respect.

Inwardly, he was making up his mind to learn more about the girl. A Boxer Goddess with the exquisite manners of an Imperial princess, and all the intelligence of a statesman and subtle logician, aroused his curiosity. Moreover, remembering the scene at the Ha-Ta Gate, he believed that she might serve him better in a capacity quite other than that for which he had at first intended her. He recollected, indeed, that the Empress Dowager's favourite heroine of history was the warrior-maiden, Whar Mou Lahn, who, like Jeanne d'Arc, went forth to battle in manly guise, and through twelve years of

heroic adventure remained a pure virgin. Some unsullied look of Mahlee's face, retained in spite of her late experience, had made him instinctively give her the appellation of "Kuniang," applied only to a virgin.

Could he not win the Empress' undying gratitude at this critical moment of national history, by presenting her with a reincarnation of her favourite female character come back as a Boxer Goddess to destroy the hated foreigners?

No one knew better than he the credulity and superstition of the old Dowager, nor how deeply impregnated she was already with faith in the divine origin of the Boxer Society which she had long more than tolerated. A "Goddess" of the cult presented at court would be sure to be received with Imperial favour; and a goddess who could at will put off her divine attributes and chat with intelligence and grace, would be made doubly welcome by the brilliant old Empress, who was by no means adverse to novelty if it had the sanction of ancient religion.

Then, when the "terrible legions" came to storm the gates of the foreign legations—he pictured the scene triumphantly—the girl should ride out from the palace and incite them to deeds of new fury. Such a leader would be invaluable to him in the management of a fanatical soldiery.

While these thoughts were traversing the great mandarin's head, his "stupid thorn," who was a pretty, vivacious little woman, whisked Mahlee away to her own apartments, where she and the "subordinate wives" plied her with a thousand questions, all of which the girl managed to answer with a pleasing ambiguity.

VII

SING and Chung, the Eurasians, who had brought Mahlee to the house of the great Manchu, had been given lodgings in the servants' quarters of the *Ta jén*. After his interview with the girl, Jung Lu called them to him and questioned them closely. A few taels and promise of rapid promotion in the army, were enough to bring forth all the information desired from these professional "trimmers." They told him that the juggler, seen by him at the Ha-Ta Gate, was an Eurasian physician and surgeon known as Dr. Sam Wang, who lived as a missionary at the Ark of the Covenant Mission. This astounding news, the mandarin received with a degree of impassiveness becoming a man of his rank. When they told him Mahlee's story, his interest became somewhat more evident. At the details of her rescue from Sam Wang on the preceding night, he actually rubbed his hands for joy. He could now present her before the Throne, knowing that she was in all respects a worthy successor of the great Whar Mou Lahn. The contentment of the two men, especially of the gigantic Sing, in telling the adventure, was too keen to admit of any doubt that they were speaking the truth. And Mahlee's own face testified, too, for her chastity.

Her admixture of foreign blood must, of course, be kept a secret, though to Jung Lu's own mind, it only enhanced her political value. Her intimate knowledge of the "foreign devils" would seem to the Empress but part of a divine equipment, while to himself it might be of inestimable service. The greatest precaution

necessary in the case was to keep the girl's whereabouts unknown to her foreign friends who were already, no doubt, seeking her anxiously.

He knew that the needful quota of loyalty could be secured from Sing and Chung by a proper equivalent in silver. But the juggler also must be made his man. In truth, while listening to the recital of the Eurasians and to their analysis of the fierce, vindictive character of Sam Wang, whom they claimed to have known since childhood, the mandarin had been seized by sudden qualms. He began to believe that his abduction of Mahlee might have serious consequences if he did not take care to conciliate the fellow promptly. For a certain amount of credulity in regard to the supernatural powers of the juggler made him feel that there would be little hope of keeping from him long the knowledge of the girl's presence in his house. And as a Boxer chief, resentful and at large, Wang would be a dangerous enemy to possess at the present juncture. The ambiguity of the Imperial Edicts, which, while openly discountenancing the Boxers, really encouraged them between the lines, would make it impossible for him to seize the man as a rebel. But at the same time, it gave to Wang himself ample opportunity, if he willed, to regard himself as such, and therefore, as foe-man, not only to the hated foreigners, but also to the scarcely less hated Manchu government of which Jung Lu commanded the entire military force.

To arouse such enmity in the breast of so forceful a character as he had immediately perceived Sam Wang to be—to excite his opposition now—would be to divide the camp in a spirit directly opposed to the secret instructions from the Throne, which daily urged upon him the necessity of amalgamating every fighting force in the Empire into one great army for the destruction of the foreigners. Jung Lu heartily sympathised with this policy of the old Dowager. As the Manchu Generalis-

simo, no one realised better than he how easily the fanaticism of the Boxer "patriots" might be turned against the government, which, although in force for more than two and a half centuries, was still regarded as alien by the great mass of the native population. In the twinkling of an eye, their watchword: "Exterminate foreigner" might take on a new clause: "Exterminate Manchu" as well. Between the necessity of keeping dormant the suspicions of the foreign ambassadors until the hour came to strike, and the still more urgent need of secretly supporting and encouraging the Great Sword Society with a view to final co-operation with it—between this Scylla and Charybdis, the Manchu bark of state found itself in dangerous waters. It was indeed a position to call out that fine impartiality expressed a little later at the end of one of the Imperial Edicts: "Converts and Boxers alike are one and all the children of the Throne, and we regard them with an equal love which in no way discriminates between the Boxer and the Christian!" Jung Lu was one who knew how to admire profoundly such noble sentiments; and their author, the old Empress who had made him what he was, had long been the object of his barbaric devotion.

He had good reason, therefore, to conciliate Sam Wang. Indeed, one schooled in the Oriental physiognomy, might have detected a new glitter in the depths of his crafty eyes at the idea of having such an auxiliary in the very camp of the enemy. His task was also rendered easier by his decision in regard to the use he should make of Mahlee. In going over in his mind the scene at the Ha-Ta Gate, he remembered that the girl had seemed to act less of her own volition than in obedience to the hypnotic influence of the magician's eyes. He reflected that without Sam Wang, a successful "reincarnation" of the heroic Whar Mou Lahn would hardly be possible. Certainly the juggler would be needed to arrange the battle tableau in which the

girl should figure as "Goddess" before the fanatical Boxers.

It was clear, then, that the man must be found at once and brought before him. The only question was how to protect Mahlee from the fellow's passion. Without a guarantee of such protection, he knew that the girl would refuse to act, though with it, he believed that she could be prevailed upon in the interest of her country to accept Wang again as her "manager." The situation was, to say the least, delicate. Obviously the only bribe that would suit the case would be the promise of high advancement to Sam Wang on condition of his observing a rigid respect for the maid.

After dismissing the Eurasians, he bade twelve of his servants (four chair-bearers and eight outriders) go at once with a sedan to the foreign hospital on Pheasant Lane and urgently invite the honourable, august, and renowned physician, Dr. Sam Wang, to accompany them back to attend upon their master, Jung Lu, who was suffering from some obscure indisposition. Since the juggler could have as yet no suspicion against him, Jung Lu counted upon this simple ruse to succeed. But he took the precaution to send Sing and Chung on an errand out of the city, so that the sight of them at his gates might not anger Wang upon entering.

Haste in the matter was the more urgent because in a few days Jung Lu, himself, expected to leave the city to join his troops which were still in the north. He wished, if possible, to take Sam Wang with him.

VIII

SOME hours later in the day, the sedan with the four chair-bearers and eight outriders was brought into the private court of Jung Lu. At the moment of its arrival, Lady Jung, who had not been taken into her husband's confidence, happened to be strolling in her garden next to the court. Hearing the sounds which signified the coming of a visitor, she applied one of her bright black eyes to a small orifice in the wall through which she was wont to spy upon her lord and his friends. Scarcely had she focussed her vision on the object of her curiosity, when she fell back with a shriek and began to palpitate like a frightened butterfly. But finding no audience to witness her fine alarms, she fluttered back to the women's court, shrilling out that she had seen a terrible fierce fellow with a scowl so savage that the sight of him had almost made her swoon. "I think he is a murderer!" she ended with conviction.

Her words, as she had calculated, were greeted with enthusiasm by the subordinate wives for whom any excitement was a welcome relief to the intolerable ennui of the harem.

"A murderer! a murderer! Let's go and see him!" They flew into the garden on their high, stilt-like heels and almost fought for possession of the peep hole. But it was too late. The man had already descended from the sedan and been admitted to Jung Lu's room.

An hour later, Mahlee, who chanced to come into the garden, saw the women silently lined up against the wall like Blue Beard's wives, their almond eyes full of the horror to which they had worked themselves under the influence of Lady Jung's suggestion. They were

waiting for the reappearance of the "assassin" whom they fully expected to see emerge with a bloody sword from their lord's chamber. Lady Jung, by right of her position as head wife, watched through the hole.

Suddenly the flowers and gold ornaments in her polished black hair began to quiver like aspen leaves. "Here he comes," she said in an intense whisper.

The others held their breath. A minute of dead silence ensued. Then the youngest wife, unable longer to bear the suspense, shrieked out: "Has he got our lord's head?"

At this, to the infinite surprise of all, Lady Jung turned and burst into a merry peal of laughter. "Got our lord's head!" she cried. "Alas, no! They are talking and smiling together. See, this is the way the fellow grins!"

Whereat this charming comedienne made an immense grimace. And all the subordinate wives peeped in turn through the hole and were soon in high merriment over their fears of "so good natured a murderer."

Mahlee, who had watched the scene at a distance with amused but alien eyes, did not guess that Jung Lu's visitor, who had arrived sulky and savage, and who was departing in the best of humours, was no other than Sam Wang.

IX

JUNG LU, also, was in an admirable mood when, in answer to his summons the next morning, Mahlee came again into his presence. The interview with Sam Wang on the preceding afternoon had been singularly to his taste. For it had heightened his self-esteem as a diplomat, a character in which he took even more pride than in his reputation as a warrior. He had seen the sullen, almost ferocious look of Wang turn to one of eager ambition in measure as he had revealed his intentions to the fellow. Then had followed a true Oriental bickering over terms. At the end, Sam Wang had given his promise to keep at a respectful distance from Mahlee until the war was over on condition that Jung Lu commend him to the Empress as candidate for the "Sapphire Button" or rank of third grade mandarin within six months, and that the girl herself be given him in case of victory to the Chinese arms.

The conference had confirmed Jung Lu's impression of Wang as a man of extraordinary force. He had long known of the remarkable work accomplished by the mysterious Ching Lin in inciting the patriots of Shantung, and when Sam Wang confessed that he and this Lin were identical, Jung Lu reflected that he was lucky, indeed, to secure, upon such easy terms, so powerful an ally for himself and the Throne. It was decided that Wang should accompany the great general northward to obtain some idea of the forces there, and of Jung Lu's methods of army discipline, before he returned to his work among the Boxers in Shantung. The men swore their pact over white wine and opium; and when the mandarin ushered his guest into the court, Wang was

wearing the grin which the Lady Jung had imitated with such pleasing effect on the other side of the wall.

Jung Lu greeted Mahlee with a smile as she entered his audience-room, and took the arm-chair to which he motioned her. He asked her with great courtesy how she had eaten and slept, and if the "mean ones of the inner apartments" had behaved themselves with seemliness towards their honourable guest. When she had politely answered these questions, he told her what he had learned of her from Sing and Chung, and expressed his intense satisfaction that she had renounced all relations with the "foreign devils" who could only in the end have corrupted her manners and damned her soul eternally. She looked grave at this and replied that she felt that she had indeed had a very narrow escape from such a doom. He then asked her if she believed it true that the earth was round as the foreigners claimed. To his mind, he confessed, it seemed far more probable that it was in the shape of a huge square upheld on a mighty pillar which in turn was sustained on the back of an enormous tortoise. She answered unsmilingly that she was inclined to take his excellency's view, and refrained from asking the pertinent question as to what might support the tortoise!

Gratified by this unexpected coincidence of opinion, he invited her to inspect with him the map which was still lying on the table. She bent over it eagerly, showing perfect familiarity with the counties, towns, and even with many of the villages involved in the Boxer movement. She told him what the strategic points were, and distinguished between their relative importance. Sam Wang's teaching had been thorough! The old general was surprised at the exactness and profundity of her knowledge; she was even able to clear up some doubtful points for him.

As she examined the map and talked with her host, she felt with joy something of her old passion for "re-

venge" return upon her. All the unjust aggressions of the foreigners—the recent and remote sources of antipathy which the mandarin cited and with which Sam Wang had already made her cognisant; the territorial encroachments, the persistent commercial intrusions, the humiliating treaties forced by other nations upon the Chinese—in fine, the "Gourd growing in the kettle which would soon leave no room to boil" as the *Ta jén* summed it up—these things seemed again to enlarge—again actually to glorify—her own personal bitterness. She made them do this for her, at least, in her profound, though unadmitted need, for self-reinforcement. For this hour, at any rate, she felt herself once more the true patriot. In spite of Sam Wang—in spite of everything!—the Cause was great. Yes, and she was in it, literally, irrevocably in it!

She let herself go in this idea; she abandoned herself with a feeling of sinking, now almost delicious; she encouraged, with an inward smile of pleasure at her growing powers, Jung Lu's masterly indirection of speech, until she had actually brought him to the point of sounding her upon her willingness to continue her rôle of Boxer Goddess—until he had even proposed outright to secure for her the Imperial patronage. This was rapid work in dealing with a Chinese mandarin! She felt herself safe enough now from the harem. But she knew better than to betray too great an eagerness. She toyed long and delicately with Jung Lu's proposals before she at last consented to them. Then she suddenly changed once more. She let him see her ardour in the red spots on her cheeks, the bright glitter in her eyes.

At the spectacle, his smile deepened. Here was a Whar Mou Lahn with spirit enough to please the old Empress! He told her that he was going to leave the city the next day, and would probably not be back until the time had come for decided action. Mean-

while every courtesy should be shown to her in his "miserable abode," and upon his return she should be presented before the Throne. He thought it wisest at present to make no allusion to the visit of Sam Wang.

Upon dismissing the girl, he gave her as a token of his favour, a duck's egg, which, he said, had lain in brine in the Imperial vaults for not less than a hundred years. He had received six from the Palace a few days since. They were considered a rare delicacy.

X

SOME ten days after the events just recorded, Andrew Handel wrote to his mother at C——, Vermont, to tell her that the search for Mahlee, the Eurasian, had as yet been fruitless.

“Alas!” he cried, “there is reason to fear the worst. We have exhausted every resource within our command to establish some trace of the young woman, but up to the present moment, we remain completely baffled. For neither the public investigation which we have insisted should be made through the agencies of both the British and American legations, nor the unremitting zeal of our own private search parties has brought forth a single clue. In these search parties which have gone out daily from our gates, all the members of the mission, as well as many of our devoted Chinese Christians, have joined most heartily. The ladies, especially Dr. Kennedy and Mrs. Parmelee, have not hesitated to expose themselves to insult and even to real danger; and Mr. Parmelee and myself have visited many of the lowest brothels of the city in the hope of finding the poor girl in one of them. But although we are still unwilling to abandon our efforts, this hope is growing more and more feeble as the days go by.

“You will be asking where Dr. Wang has been all this time, and why he has in no way concerned himself in the search for Mahlee. The question is, indeed, pertinent. As one of the same unfortunate race—if race it may be called!—and affected as has been commonly supposed by the ladies of the mission, with a certain natural predilection for the young woman, which, it had

been hoped, would lead to a union between them, one might have expected him to show more zeal than any of us in efforts for her recovery. You will share in our own surprise when I tell you that the reverse has been the truth. Scarcely three days after Mahlee's disappearance, Dr. Wang announced to us his intention of returning to Shantung, where he had spent several months of last autumn and winter in the work which I, myself, began during the spring among the famine sufferers. At that time, he carried with him the warm approval of the mission. But his present withdrawal from Peking was not looked upon with the same favour. It was taken by the ladies as evidence of an indifference to the fate of Mahlee that seemed absolutely unpardonable in view of the tender sentiments which they had attributed to him in her regard. Even to Mr. Parmelee and myself it appeared scarcely warranted under the circumstances. Miss McGinnis, whose dignity leaves something to be desired, went so far as to cast herself at Dr. Wang's feet, beseeching him with tears to remain and 'help us find our dearest darling Mahlee whom we all thought you loved.' (This young woman is occasionally rather fulsome in her use of language.) But Dr. Wang replied with the peculiar smile which has become characteristic: 'Where duty calls, Miss McGinnis, mere considerations of love must not detain me.' And the same day he was off.

"I confess that I have never fully understood this man. While heartily admiring the astonishing activity and proficiency which he displays in his profession—(never have there been such crowds at the hospital and dispensary as during the past winter)—I cannot but regret that he gives little evidence of any real sanctification of character. The Pentecostal fire seems to have been withheld from him. But (D.V.) we trust that it may descend upon him yet; then, he cannot fail to be a mighty force in our midst.

“The account of your entertainment at our home, my dear Mother, of Dr. and Mrs. Templeton, gave me genuine delight. When I think of Dr. Templeton, I am ever reminded of the words written of St. Columba but which are no less applicable to him: ‘A holy and venerable man in whom Almighty God manifested His glorious name in the sight of the heathen.’ And he will be also, without doubt, like the holy man of Iona, one whom ‘God, who loves them that love Him, and more and more glorifying those who magnify Him with sweet praises, lifts up on high with immeasurable honours.’

“We are all thankful that both he and his wife returned home when they did. For although we do not anticipate any serious trouble here in Peking the reports from the outlying districts concerning the spread of the Great Sword Society, continue alarming, and we feel that it is just as well that our dear old friends are safe in America. I am glad that Dr. Templeton’s cough seems less severe. May he be restored soon (D.V.) to perfect health.

“The annual Feast of Lanterns was celebrated this year with more than usual extravagance. The Chinese have been talking ever since of a marvellous magician who on that night openly proclaimed himself to be a Boxer and performed wonders before a great crowd at the Ha-Ta Gate. It is said that he read from anti-foreign placards and recited Boxer incantations, the wording of which, if I can judge from reports, appears to be identical with those I heard a year ago in Shantung. As climax to his performance, he summoned from the ‘Central Eight Caves’ the ‘Goddess of the Red Lantern Light’ who appeared borne on a red palanquin by a troop of scarlet-robed girls and received an oath of allegiance from a number of men desiring to become Boxer leaders. All, including the magician, exhibited on their persons the red sash of the Society.

This is, by far, the boldest manifestation that I have yet heard of as taking place in this city; but as we have heard nothing more, either of this curious Chinese Jeanne d'Arc, or of the Boxer magician, we have reason to hope that they have been arrested by the government authorities, and that the case will remain an isolated one.

"Yet it must be confessed that, so far, the action of the Chinese Government—if action it may be called!—to suppress the Boxers has been marked by a singular leisure which has put the patience of us all to its utmost test. More than this, a certain Janus-faced aspect of several of the late Edicts, which, even when apparently most uncompromising in their attitude to the Boxers, are accompanied or followed by 'secret instructions' appearing to reverse their initial sense, has caused actual doubt among us as to the real trend of Manchu sympathy. And recently this doubt has been greatly strengthened in our minds by the Imperial commendation of the notorious Yü Hsien, who, you will remember, was but lately Governor of Shantung, where his indifference to my peril last spring almost cost me my life. He is generally believed to have organised the Ta Tao Hai, or Great Sword Society, since amalgamated with the I Ho Ch'uan or Fists of Righteous Harmony. Whether or not this be true, it is undeniable that he has secretly promoted the Boxer rebellion by every means in his power, and is directly responsible for the murder of the Anglican missionary, Mr. Brooks. The insistence of the foreign legations finally effected the removal of Yü Hsien from Shantung. But now all foreigners are incensed to learn that he has been appointed Governor of the province of Shansi, after having been formally presented with the character for 'Happiness' written by the Empress Dowager's own hand. In other words, the man who represents the most violent anti-foreign feeling in China is he whom

the Empress appears most delighted to honour. What are we to think of these things?

"I have purposely exposed with some detail the *situation politique* as it now appears to us in Peking, my dear Mother, so that you may be prepared for anything which may arise later. For although, I again repeat, that I believe as all our foreign ambassadors do, that we are in no serious danger here in the capital, the future is necessarily shrouded in mystery. Yet in whatever peril I may find myself, I have your own most noble words with which to fortify my soul. For did you not say to me on our last precious Sabbath evening together, that if the high crown of martyrdom were placed on the brow of your son, you would look up to God and praise His holy name? Ah, my Mother, how well I understood you! Has not the desire for that great and final honour burned in the bosom of every true saint?

"Yet even as I write these words, I am conscious of a new and strong attachment to our earthly existence. I have not disguised from you, who know all my secrets, the nature of my increasing interest in Miss Blanche Sackville. I believe I have already told you that her father, Sir Philip Sackville, is a retired English officer who has done noble service for his country and is held in high esteem by all who know him. His wealth and exalted position are—alas!—the well-nigh insuperable obstacles which ever oppose themselves to my mad dream of increased intimacy with his daughter. For although unions between ladies of noble birth and untitled clergymen are not unknown in England, I fear that Sir Philip would regard an obscure American missionary like myself, as being quite without the pale of eligibility. But for the few months longer that Miss Sackville remains in Peking, it surely will be no sin to give myself the exquisite pleasure, which is yet half pain, of seeing her as often as possible?

"Indeed, I have had that pleasure quite recently, having had occasion, last week, to visit the British legation in the interest of Mahlee. The gracious concern which Miss Sackville evinced for the poor Eurasian did her much credit. She even insisted upon giving me a considerable sum of money to be used in the search, saying that she had taken an extraordinary fancy to the girl, and should be greatly grieved if she could not be found.

"But it is time for this letter to close, since I see that the mail-carrier is already here with his bag. Adieu, my dear Mother. May peace dwell in you. *Si Deus nobiscum, bnis contra nos?*

"Ever your dutiful and affectionate son,

"ANDREW HANDEL."

XI

AFTER the departure of Jung Lu, Mahlee found herself in an elegant prison, with the mandarin's wives and concubines who had been left in the care of a chief eunuch, as her only companions. The principal occupations of these ladies were embroidery, chess, and tea drinking. Gathered all together with their hand-maids and lap-dogs in Lady Jung's sitting room, or, as the spring advanced, in a large pavilion in the flower-garden, they looked like the silken dames of their own tapestries. And what tapestries and embroideries they made !

Under their skilful needles came forth rare creatures, indeed—rainbow-coloured things clinging to the surfaces of inimitable silks, like the iridescent down to a butterfly's wing. Animals, birds, reptiles, and exquisite insects—flying fish, and fire-spitting dragons, storks on one leg snapping at pale moons, lizards, scorpions, serpents, and beautiful conventions of tree and flower and gem, appeared as if by magic to embellish their tunics, their shoes, fillets for their hair, coverlets for their beds, and superb hangings for their chamber walls. Upon these last, several of the ladies would work at the same time, under the direction of Lady Jung, who was chief designer. Her compositions were charming, showing quaint landscapes with fantastic palaces and summer-houses set in high-walled gardens, where unimaginably stiff ladies, followed by poodles with monstrous ears, paced on marbles terraces, while in a distance without perspective rose the roofs of temples and pagodas from the eaves of which hung tiny silken tassels in lieu of bells.

Mahlee, whose skill in needlecraft was but mediocre, was yet able to teach the ladies some new stitches which she had learned from Mrs. Templeton. She also showed them how to knit (an unknown art among the Chinese). They used slender ivory chopsticks for needles and were soon knitting up their skeins of multi-coloured silks into snuff-pouches, bags for their hand mirrors, and cosmetics, and sachets to place under their pillows. They were wonderfully delighted with these things and discarded the pieces upon which they had been working to take up the new fad.

Notwithstanding the almost childish awe which she inspired by something rich and unusual in her bearing, Mahlee became a favourite among them. Without betraying her connection with the foreigners, she could tell them many interesting things of which they had never before heard. They came to the conclusion that she was a Tartar princess whom their lord was holding as hostage of war. Had he not told them to treat her with extreme deference? They saw that she was not to be made a concubine, so she must be some great person. A little jealous, they nevertheless admired loudly her "august beauty like a lake in autumn"; they praised the originality of her coiffure, the whiteness of her teeth, the redness of her lips, the smoothness of her throat, her small delicate ears, her hands with their long tapering fingers. But they urged her to cultivate her nails and use cosmetics. Their own nails, sheathed in gold filigree, were three inches long, and their faces were quite frankly whitened to what might have seemed an alarming pallor had they not been just as frankly relieved by the carmine on the lips and the round spots of scarlet on the cheeks, painted with no real attempt at illusion yet with a certain decorative skill. Only upon two features of Mahlee's person did they refrain from compliment. They were secretly shocked by the size of her feet and the strange colour

of her eyes—"blue like a demon's," as Lady Jung whispered to the others.

By April, the ivy which mantled the high walls of the garden was in tender crimson leaf. Even before the exotic flowers were in bloom, Mahlee found in the place a quaint charm suggestive of the precise refinements of an antique race. The enclosure was laid out in uniform lozenge-shaped plots wherein a multitude of dwarf trees like the toy trees of a child's Noah's ark had been set: nor were the usual rockery and fountain in the centre of Chinese gardens missing, the small aquatic nooks at the base of the rocks being inhabited by Lady Jung's pet fishes. These were terrible little monsters, produced by some curious process of breeding, with heads twice the size of their bodies and enormous bulging eyes; they swam with fluted fins and tails extended about them like the skirts of a ballet dancer. Lady Jung fed them herself; one of the items of their daily nourishment being a red geranium petal apiece "to preserve their bright colour," as the lady told Mahlee in all seriousness.

As the spring sunshine became more steady, the ladies abandoned their inner chambers almost entirely, and sat for hours in the garden pavilion. As head wife, Lady Jung was supposed to train her subordinates in manners and morals. This duty she discharged daily by reading to them as fast as her tongue could go, a rule or two from a section of the "Book of Rites" known as the *Nei Tseh* or "Deportment in the Inner Compartments;" and then catechising them on what she had read,—somewhat as follows: "A wife should excel in four things: virtue, speech, deportment, and needle work.—Chin Yue," turning to the youngest wife with a great pretence of solemnity, "what four excellencies should characterise a spouse?"

Poor "Harvest Moon," a mere child, whose face was as round as her name indicated, and whose wits were

always wool-gathering, would invariably hang her head for answer. At this, all the others would laugh, and Lady Jung, shaking her own head dolefully, while looking at Mahlee with something very like a wink, would predict a "terrible whipping for some one at our lord's return." But when the tears began to flow down the chubby cheeks of little Harvest Moon, the dainty lady would playfully pinch her ear, and whisper into it: "If you make haste and pour me out a cup of tea, I won't tell on you this time." In her eagerness, Chin Yue would probably spill the tea and evoke another explosion of mirth: and the lesson in etiquette would be at an end.

Sometimes, the ladies would have visitors, other great *tai-tais*, who would arrive with their handmaids and babies in closely curtained sedans. The interchange of affabilities on these occasions was endless,—exhausting, as it seemed to Mahlee, all the "three hundred rules of ceremony" and the "three thousand rules of behaviour," mentioned in the classics. The receiving ladies would praise their guests' "august raiment," the "golden lilies" of their feet, their faces "shaped like a melon seed," and say that the fathers of their sons must be even richer than Li Hung Chang who was known by all to be an Aladdin of wealth. At this, the visiting dames, secretly delighted, but with a pretence of deep melancholy, would shake their bird-like heads: "Alas! no; our sons' fathers are no more than mean coolies, and that is why we must appear in such miserable rags."

And as if to substantiate this pathetic confidence, they bade their handmaids show the ladies their "wretched offspring." Whereupon were brought forward the most absurd and adorable little dolls of flesh and blood, swaddled to excess in exquisite rainbow-coloured fabrics, with tiny reddened lips and cheeks like their mothers', and incredibly minute queues.

XII

IN the Market-town of the Crows (Lao Kua Chên) in Shantung, whither he had come from the north after a brief sojourn with Jung Lu and his troops, Sam Wang was less daintily occupied. The head men of the town, meeting him on the day of his arrival, had pressed the "Illustrious Patriot Ching Lin" to possess himself immediately of the *Yamen* or quarters of the military and civil bureaus, conveniently vacated the day before by the former magistrate, who, having presumed to put down some disturbance of the Boxers, had found himself suddenly degraded. The Patriot showed no hesitation in accepting the office and his fame, already great in this region, soon became, with the new title of "benevolent and loving magistrate," not less than phenomenal. For outside of his new magisterial duties, he continued to practise surgery in the daytime, and jugglery by night, and his feats in both arts were regarded as equally miraculous.

A part of the *Yamen* itself had been turned into an operating room. And now on an afternoon in late spring, Sam Wang stood with his sleeves rolled up and instruments in hand, before a table upon which was stretched an old Chinese peasant under the influence of an anæsthetic. Dr. Wang was operating for goitre. As he worked, he gave from time to time gruff, terse orders to his attendant, who strangely enough was no other than the Eurasian Sing. For either by fear or sincere repentance of their former disaffection, in seeing Wang exalted by Jung Lu, he and his comrade Chung had "eaten dust," and been taken back into the Patriot's employ.

"More sponges here. Fetch a pail. Now put the cone over his mouth again for a minute. Can't you see he needs more ether?"

Sing obeyed in silence. When the operation was completed, Wang applied the bandages with a few rapid movements.

"Call Chung and take him out," he said, denoting the inert figure and removing his surgical apron as if his day's work were over. "Then *you*," he said peremptorily, "come back."

Left a moment to himself, Sam Wang's eyes glistened.

"The fifty-ninth operation since my arrival and almost all successful. The Wizard of Oz would find his nose broken if he came here! Even the village 'Bullies' for leagues around call me Master. I'll give them a few jinks to-night in the Market place and distribute our new muskets. Then we'll go and set up the Boxer altars in the Dog's Tooth village."

He moved briskly about the room, washing his surgical instruments and putting them back into their cases. "Twelve thousand in this neighbourhood alone who have taken the oath. At this rate, in less than a month we'll be ready to make our swoop on Peking. . . . Ah, Mahlee! Mahlee!"

His old exultant grin broke over his face as he seized a piece of paper and a Chinese pen. "We'll give her a sign of life." He sat down by a table and inscribed rapidly a page of native characters, his grin broadening as he wrote. When the big Sing re-entered, Wang thrust the paper into his hands.

"The love between us is neither excessive nor blind," he said, speaking in Chinese and holding Sing with a look which made the young giant shrink a little. "Yet if you will deliver this letter into Mahlee's own hands before the middle of the next moon, I will make you and your comrade my lieutenants when we are in Peking."

Sing bowed almost to the ground. "It shall be done, your excellency."

He went out, and the illustrious Patriot, with his grin still on his lips, proceeded to prepare himself for the "Jinks" in the Market place.

. . . Later, that same night, twenty *li* away in the Dog's Tooth Village, he set up the Boxer altars. And men and women and children, stripped almost naked, drunk with rice-brandy and cataleptic frenzy, danced before them, slashing their bare limbs with swords and thrusting pikes into their abdomens, while they raised in hideous guttural chorus, their murderous chants.

When dawn came to light anew the village threshing floors, those who had killed themselves in the trial were quickly and quietly buried. Yet most of the people had sustained no injuries by reason of some secret spell cast over them by their "benevolent and loving magistrate."

XIII

AFTER a month of life in Jung Lu's palace, Mahlee was suffering the torments of a Gulliver imprisoned by the Lilliputians. She seemed to be caught and held down by the fine threads of a cobweb—the floss of embroidery silk! She was exasperated by inanity, by inaction. Was it to stitch butterflies on slippers, to sip perfumed tea from cups of egg-shell china with a mandarin's concubines, that she had broken with her past? Was this, forsooth, the mighty part she had dreamed of playing in the destiny of nations? She could scarcely control her impatience, scarcely wait until Jung Lu's return. She began, too, to doubt his good faith. Did he really mean to present her to the Empress, or had his promise been a ruse to keep her contented, until, imperceptibly softened by luxury and silken ease, she had become a tame thing for his harem? The idea made her frantic. But the next moment she saw that it was unreasonable. Jung Lu had evinced too sincere a pleasure at her consent to carry on her work as Boxer Goddess to make her doubt seriously his intentions in regard to her. No, he had been in earnest. She must be patient and wait. Like Joan of Arc, she must listen for the Voices, she must try to prepare herself to inspire and save her people. Her people! The words rang like a knell in her heart. Yet she insisted upon them to herself with vehemence. "Yes, *my* people, my own people whom I love." But somewhere in the depths of her soul, she heard her own ironic laughter.

And day by day in spite of her utmost effort to maintain her enthusiasm for the "Cause"—to keep

herself up to the fighting pitch—she felt that enthusiasm ebb. Vainly at present did she rehearse to herself the hideous wrongs inflicted upon the Chinese by the foreigners; vainly did she call them unjust and cruel oppressors; some strong current in her blood fought on their side. In desperation, she tried to arouse her old resentment against Andrew Handel—that savage jealousy which had first made her espouse the Boxer cause. But she perceived, with a curious dismay, that it, too, had grown weak. In fact, her persistent thought of Andrew, far from inciting her now to new hatred, threw her into an agonised anxiety in regard to him. She was in the paradoxical position of a woman overwrought by tender apprehensions for her sworn enemy. And this perception that her love was not really dead, maddened her the more. She looked upon that love as a secret and burning shame, as the traitor within her own breast. She wrestled with it, she tore it with violent and murderous hands, but she was powerless to drive it from her.

At the end she was seized by a strange despair in which she fell to wondering in a helpless way if she could do anything without Sam Wang. She had not dared to think of him since that terrible hour at East Bell Street. The least reminder of it, as when she had opened a wardrobe one day and saw the red dress she had worn, turned her cold as a corpse. Yet with her loathing, came a sick realisation of her dependence upon Wang for success in her chosen task. As she had said, he had practically hypnotised her at the Ha-Ta Gate. Would she be able to do anything alone? Would she soon have any hate left?—that was the question. She chafed at her inactivity, while doubting her power—aye—her desire!—to do what she had set herself. Well, she could only wait until the appointed time. Perhaps something—the Voices—might come to her help.

Outside this secluded garden, she knew that there were tremendous forces working rapidly towards a climax. But here she could learn nothing. It is true that the *tai-tais* who come in the sedans were the wives of important court officials, but they were as ignorant as children. The most that they could tell her was that the old Empress hated the "foreign devils," but that when the great general Tung Fu Hsiang offered to bring his "terrible legions" from the wild west of Kansu province to drive every foreigner into the sea, she had replied with an amiable smile that the time was not yet come. All these ladies, including Lady Jung herself, knew the Empress personally. Some of them were her blood relations and spoke of her as Lao-Tzu-Tzung "The Great Ancestress," or still more reverentially as "The Old Buddha." But they seemed to fear to talk of her except in ceremonious formulas. And rarely did they refer in any way to the Emperor.

Under ordinary circumstances, Lady Jung, and at least the second wife, would have returned the visits of their friends, and Mahlee might have had the opportunity to accompany them. But Jung Lu had left strict orders with his chief eunuch, who acted as steward of the household, that during his absence the ladies should not leave home.

The months passed; the impatience of Mahlee became more and more acute each day. But it was not until the morning of the thirteenth of June that a break came in the monotony. This day chanced to be the anniversary of Lady Jung's birth. By way of celebration the garden walks were spread with carpets and a large purple canopy with golden fringe was extended, under which, around little tables, female visitors gathered at an early hour of the day. Lady Jung, playing the great dame on her seat amidst the "secondary wives," with the "Tartar Princess" at her side, welcomed all her

guests with the same bright smile, which showed two rows of dazzling little teeth, before she bade her handmaids set chairs for them and bring them tea. She asked them if they liked the music of the flutes and citherns which proceeded from a corner of the garden, and when they had replied in a rapturous affirmative, she sent little Harvest Moon to order the musicians to play louder so that they might be "better heard." At this, the instruments quickened to a veritable frenzy of sound, and Lady Jung's bright smile broadened as a band of gigantic creatures, wearing monstrous masks with exaggerated noses, and beards a yard long, appeared under the purple canopy.

These were dancers on stilts with motions like drunken daddy-long-legs. They advanced with great leaps, and joining hands in a circle, danced with crazed rapidity in time to the ever quickening music. Then suddenly bounding off their stilts, and throwing away their masks, these curious acrobats began a series of wild somersaults, tumblings, and wrestlings which finally turned into clever jugglery.

It was just as the last of these fellows, almost a giant in stature, who unlike the others, had retained his mask, was subsiding, exhausted, on the ground not far from her feet, that Mahlee felt her sleeve slightly pulled. But the touch was so light and swift that she would have been scarcely aware of it had she not almost at the same moment become conscious of a small folded paper lying in her lap. She was sure then that the wrestler had dropped it there. As she looked towards him again, he removed his mask, and she recognised the Eurasian, Sing. The incident was so strange that she paled, as her hand quickly closed over the paper. A moment later she gave some excuse to seek her own chamber. There, unfolding the missive with a hand which trembled, she read this curious communication written in Chinese characters :—

"Wang of the Iron Mouth greets the Goddess of the Red Lantern Light!

"The bits of fur from under the legs of many foxes will in the end make a robe. . . . Foxes by thousands are lending their legs. Our robe will soon be ready—the ample shroud which is destined to smother to death every foreign devil in China. Therefore, prepare yourself also."

Mahlee dropped the paper with a cry. Sam Wang knew where she was then! he had known all the time; it was even probable that he had made some secret alliance with Jung Lu. And this present act was in accord with his old spirit of bravado; he wished to remind her that they were Patriots together—allies in the same Cause—that whatever might be her personal feelings towards him, there could be no backing out of that. And in spite of the hate and repulsion which the quickening sense of Sam Wang brought her, she began soon to experience a positive relief, rising from some unsounded depths of fatalism hidden in her nature.

Had she not instinctively felt that without Sam Wang she could do nothing? Well, here he was! She had only to yield herself to his guidance again, and she could—she *should*—accomplish her mission. His puppet!—but what of it? Anything was better than the powerless stagnation into which she had felt herself rapidly falling as soon as she had been left to herself. If she did not hate enough, Sam Wang certainly did! Yet this sense of relief was strictly conditioned upon a great reserve that she made for herself. He could use her as he liked for the Cause, but for her own personal liberty she was prepared to fight him for ever.

At this moment she refused to reckon with that strong opposite current of her blood—with her love for Andrew Handel. It did not—it could not—exist she told herself fiercely. Her nature was made for action, and the anticipation of any chance for it now after so

much sloth, brought out again the red spots in her cheeks, the sharp glitter in her eyes.

She went back to the garden and feasted with Lady Jung's guests until afternoon. But as soon as they were gone she was seized by so great a restlessness, that she determined there and then to defy Jung Lu's orders. She must positively know without an hour's delay something of what was taking place in the world outside. Acting upon this impulse, she saw the chief eunuch and commanded him in a tone of authority to prepare a sedan for her as she wished to take the air. He demurred, but she insisted with so imperious an aspect that he finally consented, sending with her a bodyguard of fourteen eunuchs.

Lady Jung and the subordinate wives watched enviously (though with no thought of claiming the same privilege) as the "Tartar Princess" stepped into her sedan and was carried into the city.

XIV

SHE had no objective point in view. When the chair-bearers asked her where she wished to go she replied vaguely, "I will go twelve *li* and then return." A *li* is a third of a mile. They carried her at random about the city.

She parted the curtains of the sedan and looked out. An unusual calm prevailed in the streets—a calm which seemed to Mahlee almost like suspense, as if the old city were unconsciously waiting for something. Above her in the sunny air, flocks of pigeons, let loose from all points of the compass, were making a vibrant melody. For the Chinese attach to the tails of these birds, small hollow gourds piped like diminutive organs through which the air passes as through æolian harps. Below, on the streets, in familiar concourse with dogs and naked babies, scores of magpies pecked about in a friendly way, or stopped to plume their black and white feathers; while above them on the branches of trees, or on the tops of walls and houses, innumerable crows, more cautious, as well as more cunning than the magpies, kept up a continual harsh cawing. The camels were losing in this warm weather their shaggy coats, which adhered in shreds to their leathery hides and hung in bunches from their humps. The little donkeys from the country seemed meeker and more tired than usual under their straddlers, or over-loaded panniers, and the belled and caparisoned mules, between their swaying litters, looked jaded in the heat. But the hot sun was evidently agreeable to some childish old men whom Mahlee saw engaged in the pastime of spinning tops. One of them had a bat-shaped kite which he was trying in vain to raise

into the motionless air. Past them, two senile-looking children tottered under heavy burdens. Over all, the fine dust, carried by imperceptible currents from the desert of the Gobi, drifted into the city unceasingly.

For although the brightness of the June afternoon may have touched the gildings of the shop-fronts and the faïence of the ancient roofs to a gleam of their original splendour, it was the same Peking, worn and tarnished and stained, which Mahlee had known since babyhood—the old barbaric city where for two millenniums men and women and beasts, and little naked babies, have mingled in the streets by generations, honey-combing into each other so nicely that the differences of age and custom from one cycle to another have been scarcely perceptible.

But to-day the torpor of the streets seemed to Mahlee ominous. She had the indescribable sense of something impending, something about to occur never before known or imagined. The city appeared to her like a mighty opium-eater sinking into that state of complete lethargy when direful visions begin. In another moment, as in the brain of a De Quincey, the theatre would be “opened and lighted,” the monstrous drama would commence to unroll itself with all the “weight of incubus and nightmare.”

Suddenly a tremor ran through her. Her sedan had turned into the Ha-Ta Great Street through which some months before she had been carried in her palanquin as Goddess of the Red Lantern Light. Now something else was happening here! She peered down the long vista between the gilded shops with their flaming scarlet and green sign-boards in the direction of the colossal gate which terminated it. But although comparatively near, she could not see the gate. It was hidden by an immense column of dust, which, as she watched, broke and began to roll in huge billows towards her. In advance of it, she could see the vehicles

and the pedestrians quicken their pace until they were all on a dead run. In the gorgeous old avenue they looked like leaves driven before a gale. Her chair-bearers had just time to carry her into the shelter of an open gateway near the corner of Legation Street before a man on a horse whirled by, galloping furiously and waving his arms in fearful amaze.

"They're coming! They're coming!" he shouted—"The Spirit Soldiers—eight million of them!"

Mahlee's heart stood still, then beat again wildly. The Boxers! They were here! The running of the Pekingese became swifter and more panic-stricken until it was a veritable stampede. Drivers of carts and mule-litters leapt to the shafts of their vehicles and lashed their animals like madmen. A whole train of camels, spurred to frenzy, broke into an appalling gallop, with huge necks outstretched, and mouths opened in hideous cries of rage. Donkeys brayed, dogs howled, children screamed; small-footed women, snatching babies to their arms, hobbled wildly, sobbing and calling upon all their ancestors for help. And as the wheels and shafts of the vehicles became tangled together, the air grew loud with curses.

"May demons carry you off!"

"May fish be your coffin and water be your grave!"

"May you be thrown on the Mountain of Knives!"

"May you be fried in the caldron of oil!"

Before she had seen a single Boxer, Mahlee was half suffocated by the dust, and all but deafened by the din. Then, again, her heart stopped beating. For advancing up the street upon an immense black mule with scarlet trappings, in the full regalia of a Boxer chief, she saw Sam Wang. He looked as one who had ridden fast and far. His big head wound about with a red cloth was thrown slightly backwards on his short massive neck from which the veins stood out like purple cords. Even from a distance, Mahlee could see that he was sweating

profusely, and that his eyes were bloodshot with the heat and dust. But his enormous barrel-chest heaved exultantly, and his whole face shone with so cruel a power that the girl instinctively shrank back into the farthest recesses of her sedan.

"Kwanti! Kwanti! The Great War-God!" the people cried and fled before him.

When Mahlee looked again, he was within a few yards of her, and she could see his smile—the smile which she knew and hated! He rode in the midst of forty young lads, all wearing the insignia of the I Ho Ch'uan. They typified the countless hosts of "spirits" hovering unseen above the ranks of the faithful. Waving flags proclaimed their motto: "Spirits and Fists mutually assist." Behind them, pouring in a swift and steady stream through the Ha-Ta Gate came the Boxers. There were myriads of them. In full uniform of red sash, shoes, and headcloth, their eyes burning like live coals in their yellow faces, they rushed up the street, while from their throats burst, like a monstrous reiterated croak, the double word: "Shashao" (kill-burn). Through the vast dust that they raised, they looked to Mahlee like lurid demons advancing in clouds of smoke.

When he had arrived at a point directly opposite to her, Sam Wang stopped. The forty lads, also, stood stock still, and the hordes behind, thus checked, swayed backwards simultaneously like a tide which has suddenly turned. The effect was so frightful that Mahlee clenched the sides of her sedan and went pale to the lips. Had he seen her? "My God! My God!"

But in another instant she perceived that she had not been detected. He appeared merely to be listening intently, with head turned towards the street of the foreign legations at the corner of which he now stood. Suddenly, around it, came a masked rider who at once approached Sam Wang and began to talk rapidly. The

two men were so close to her that Mahlee could catch most of the words.

"Legations preparing to fire on patriots entering by Ch'ien Gate. Not wise yet to attack them. Go now to north of city. Destroy Roman Catholic Cathedrals. Burn all mission stations and homes of Christians. Kill without mercy. Come to-morrow to my house. The girl is there. Will present her in a few days before the Empress."

Ah! . . . Mahlee gasped. The voice was that of Jung Lu, who had dropped his tone of ceremony and was talking like a soldier. Sam Wang bowed from his saddle in acknowledgment of the great general's orders, though it was clear that he was disappointed not to be permitted to attack the legations immediately.

As Jung Lu turned away, the sharp firing of machine-guns split the air. Mahlee saw Sam Wang pause, even hesitate. He was evidently itching to respond at once to that challenge. But he merely grinned defiantly; and she heard him say in English as if to himself:

"Well, their turn will come soon enough. Meanwhile a little fun at the cathedrals. And our dear old Ark of the Covenant—that will make a pretty bonfire!"

With an exultant guffaw he raised himself in his saddle, and spurred his big mule into a gallop. Then, for what seemed to Mahlee an eternity, the world was blotted out in dust, through which the trampling of myriads of feet, and the horrid croak of "Sha-shao" rose to her ears in a maddening crescendo.

XV

As soon as she could breathe and see again, Mahlee leaned out of her sedan and gave a series of sharp imperative orders to her chair-bearers. They did not at once understand, and she repeated with the utmost impatience :

“Foreign Mission on Pheasant Lane near Anting Gate. Use all the short cuts possible ; get ahead of the soldiers. Go quickly ! quickly !”

But when they were in motion she was still dissatisfied ; every moment or two she opened the curtains and cried :

“Up this street now ! through this alley ! Faster ! faster !” until the men were running with the chair. It was only when she saw that the column of dust which represented the Boxer battalions was actually behind her, that her face lost a little of its haggard look ; and even then she sat with her body bent tensely forward as if ready to spring from the vehicle and run herself, should there be a second's delay.

For the last words she had heard Sam Wang utter had left a single burning point of consciousness in her brain. He was going with his devils to the Ark of the Covenant Mission. Andrew was there—she must save him ! . . . She had no definite idea of how she would do it ; least of all did she realise the utter inconsistency of her action with her scheme of vengeance—or the vow she had taken as Goddess of the Boxers. She only sat with clenched hands and rigid face praying that she should not be too late. At last they turned her chair into Pheasant Lane. The little street was quiet, almost deserted, in fact. Thank Heaven ! she was in

time. She flung herself out at the big west gate of the mission; it was open, but neither of the old watchmen who usually kept guard appeared. Not waiting to wonder at this circumstance, she went in and ran through court after court, calling aloud the names of Andrew Handel and of the other missionaries. Getting no reply, she entered the houses whose doors like the gate of the compound were open, and continued her calling. Nobody! The truth suddenly flashed upon her. The missionaries had received some previous warning and had fled. They had evidently taken with them, too, the Chinese Christians connected with the mission: for the boys' and girls schoolhouses, the women's hospital and the chapel were all alike empty.

There were other signs to show her that her surmise was correct. In the Parmelee's house a trunk half-packed with children's clothes stood in the middle of the sitting-room floor, probably abandoned at the last moment because of its weight. In the rooms of the "ladies" at the girls' school, the floors were strewn with garments which had been thrown from the wardrobes, so that a selection could be more quickly made. In a gilt cage, without seed or water, Miss Dorn's canary was dying. Half mechanically, Mahlee filled up its little tanks; then slowly returned to the Court of Lilacs.

For at the discovery that she had come on a useless errand, a strong reaction of feeling had begun to set in. In truth, without admitting it to herself, she was bitterly disappointed that Andrew had already fled—that he had had no need of her even to be saved. She leaned against the trunk of the old locust tree under which they had stood together a year ago, and felt again that unutterable sense of defeat which had shot through her when he had dropped her hand on its way to his lips. With the memory, her old resentment began to return upon her, and she accused herself furiously of being a

traitor in having come here to save him. Yet the very realisation of her relapse paralysed her. To whom, to what did she now belong?—ambiguous wretch that she was! Could she be sure, if Andrew should appear, that even at this moment she would not cast herself at his feet?

Then suddenly, as if to put an end to her dilemma, the horrible reiterated croak of the Boxers filled the air: Sha-shao! Sha-shao! Sha-shao!

They had reached the mission.

Mahlee threw her head back and laughed wildly.

"My Voices! My Voices!" she cried, rushing into the court and through it to the gate of the compound.

"Come on! Come on! Come and burn our dear old Ark of the Covenant. It will make a pretty bonfire!"

The next instant she was face to face with Sam Wang. He stared at her speechlessly; then in a flash took in the situation.

"Back! back!" he cried to his braves in a tone of thunder. "Let my wife pass to her sedan."

And with strange dignity, he offered her his arm and helped her himself into the chair.

It was not until she was half way back to Jung Lu's house, that the girl turned, and through the rear window of the sedan saw the old mission in flames. For the rest of the journey she sobbed like a sick child.

XVI

LATE in the afternoon of the 16th of June a Grand Council was assembled in the I Luan Hall of the "Purple Forbidden City." Their Majesties, the Emperor and the Empress Dowager of China, seated side by side on thrones, received the Manchu princes, dukes and high officials, both Chinese and Manchu, of the Six Boards and Nine Ministries.

It was a brilliant company. Through the windows of the great room the horizontal sunbeams brought out the sheen of marvellous silks and touched to high light the jewelled buttons and aigrets of the Mandarins' hats. The nobles of the two highest grades were distinguishable by red coral buttons, plain and chased, with corresponding civil badges of the White Crane and the Golden Pheasant and military insignia of the Unicorn and the Lion; while the six following grades were represented respectively by buttons of sapphire, lapis lazuli, rock crystal, adularia and plain and chased gold. The tunics of the courtiers, reaching below the knee, and tightly belted in at the waist in imitation of the Emperor's slender figure, displayed the Double Dragon in rich embroidery over the back and breast. Besides this decoration the young Manchu dandies sported magnificent belt buckles in carved jade or gold set with precious stones, and had hanging from their belts a number of jewelled cases for watches, knives, fans and chop-sticks.

In contrast with their gorgeousness, the Emperor, Kwang-Hsu, looked almost plain. Dressed in a long yellow robe, girded about his slim waist, his unique ornament was the great "Flaming Pearl" of the Dynasty worn as a button in his hat. He had, indeed, the air

of some absent-minded ascetic who had wandered in by mistake, his heavy drooping lids and thin compressed lips expressing a mixture of ennui and troubled foreboding which betrayed itself likewise in a continual clasping and unclasping of his inordinately long and lean hands. He attracted few glances, and such as he did receive were, for the most part, ones of pity from those who realised his helplessness. For although their Majesties sat side by side, it was the Aunt and not the Nephew who ruled the Council and to whom every eye was now turned.

"C'est le seul homme de la Chine," has been said of her, but those who saw her upon that day must have pronounced her rather a marvellous manifestation of the Eternal Feminine wielding supreme power in a land where all other women were slaves.

Tze-Shi was then in her sixty-sixth year, but appeared like a handsome woman in her prime. The throne upon which she sat was heightened by cushions to give room for the six-inch heels of her Manchu slippers, a device which made her seem much taller than she really was; the imposing effect of her figure being increased, too, by the long unbroken line of her tunic of Imperial Yellow which fell in one piece from neck to floor over a soft under-gown of the same hue and contour.

This outer garment was of very stiff transparent silk, showing a design worked in perils over a brocade of wisteria blossoms. Out of its immense sleeves, the old Dowager's hands appeared as small as a child's and still marvellously beautiful, suggesting a sensitiveness of touch as acute as that of an insect's antennæ. The wrists were clasped with bracelets, and the fingers adorned by rings and nail protectors wrought in gold and polished jade. Above them, against the dark carving of the Double Dragon Throne, the head of the Empress appeared at first glance like a magnificent piece of jewel work set in a sombre frame, an impression due not only to her

dazzling coiffure composed in the Manchu winged bow style with a profusion of precious stones to relieve the jet-like blackness of the hair, but also to the astonishing brilliancy of her eyes which flashed in her head like two superb black diamonds. At this moment their sparkling seemed the result of a concentrated energy of purpose which was reflected on the broad brow, slightly knitted above them, and in the expression of the large mobile mouth.

She lifted an exquisite hand as she opened the Council, and her voice when she spoke was as melodious as a pagoda bell with a strange vibrating undertone which betrayed her passion.

"The Foreign Powers," she said, "have browbeaten and persecuted us in such a manner that we cannot endure this any longer. We must therefore combine to fight all foreigners to the last, to save our 'face' in the eyes of the world. All our Manchu Princes, Dukes, Nobles, and Ministers high and low are unanimous in this determination for war to the knife, and I approve their patriotic choice. I therefore give you all this announcement and expect all to do their duty to their country."

There was an almost unanimous murmur of approbation among the silken-clad exquisites who had dropped to their knees at the sound of the Imperial Voice. But as the Empress bade them rise again, not a few dissatisfied glances were rapidly interchanged. The sharp eyes of the old Dowager were the first to perceive these signs of discontent, and immediately she invited an open discussion of the question. An awkward pause ensued; then, Hsü Ching Ch'êng, ex-Minister to Russia, and President of the Manchurian Railway, advanced with some hesitation, and kowtowing again before the throne, begged that her Majesty's decision be reconsidered, since it was impracticable to fight all the Powers at once.

At his words the face of the Empress darkened perceptibly, but the Emperor for the first time raised his heavy lids, and seemed on the point of giving an eager assent to the counsel, when his august Aunt stopped him by an impatient gesture.

The mandarin Kang I, known to be a favourite of the Dowager, and one of the boldest partisans of the I Ho Ch'uan, had flung himself face downwards before the throne and was speaking rapidly :

"O Highest Wisdom of the Ages, Worshipful Sovereigns," he cried, "never permit your ears to be again insulted by such base and cowardly words as have just been uttered and which proceed from no true patriot. For this glorious war into which we are about to enter will be entirely unlike all former conflicts, insomuch as we have now the valiant Boxers in innumerable companies known as the Public Harmony Braves, who, being invulnerable alike to sword or bullet, will so mightily reinforce your Majesties' armies that the whole world must fall before us like wheat before a sickle."

The Dowager greeted this prophecy with a charming smile which displayed her dazzling white teeth. "Aye," she cried, nodding her head emphatically, "the I Ho Ch'uan is a grand Society, full of valour and patriotism."

But she had scarcely expressed her approbation when a third mandarin bowed before her. This was Yuan Ch'ang, a Minister of the Tsung Li Yamen or Bureau of Foreign Affairs.

"August and incomparable Lights of Knowledge," he said, "let not your hearts be deceived by vain pretensions, nor give you hearing to fools. But listen rather to true science. Yesterday, being myself an eye-witness of the Boxer attacks upon the legations, I beheld the scene of the conflict strewn with the bodies of their leading men each with a bullet or two through them. How then can these fellows be invulnerable?"

The question appeared to be highly indiscreet, for the Empress reddened visibly, though it might have been remarked that the lips of the young man at her side formed themselves into an enigmatic smile.

"You must be mistaken," the Dowager exclaimed shortly. "Those dead men you saw cannot possibly have been Boxers, but worthless outlaws whom the gods have justly destroyed. But as for the noble patriots of the I Ho Ch'uan, I know well that they cannot be wounded by sword or bullet or any other projectile, for I have watched them myself at crucial tests and the results are indisputable."

This promptly extinguished the Minister of the Tsung Li Yamen, who retired into the back of the hall with a perceptible grimace.

But the Marquis Tsêng, who was known to have had relations with the foreigners for many years, now dropped to his knees and after apostrophising both their Majesties, said :

"If fight there must be, let it not take place in Peking, but in some more advantageous position ; and, above all, let the legations be respected. Some of the Powers are entirely friendly to China ; must we fight them all alike ?"

The Dowager looked gloomy, and made no attempt to answer the question, but the Emperor began to show signs of life. His enigmatic smile broadened, and he even ventured to give a slight encouraging nod to a mandarin, standing behind the Marquis, who appeared to desire audience. It was Na Tung, a recent accession to the Yamen, who, alone, of all the Manchus was opposed to the policy of war. At the Emperor's gesture, he prostrated himself and performed the kowtow :

"Great Ancestress, be happy !" cried he. "O Son of Heaven, attain a serene old age ! But never darken the resplendent glory of your reign by an unjust and foolish

war such as certain evil counsellors now advise. Rather let the unsullied splendour of Peace——”

He was interrupted by hisses and vituperations from his clansmen. “Traitor! Coward!”

The Emperor raised a silencing hand. “Nay, hear him out,” he commanded.

But the insulted Mandarin had leapt to his feet and was facing his accusers.

“Very well,” he cried, in the accent of one who addresses unreasonable children. “Have your way then, but if you must fight, go at least out of Peking nearer the coast.” He turned away abruptly as if washing his hands of the whole matter.

The Empress Dowager glared at him, and looked to her favourite, Kang I, to reply.

“I suggest,” said that gentleman laconically, “that Na Tung and Hsü Ching Ch’êng, who oppose our policy, be appointed to go out to meet the Seymour Expedition which is now on its way from Tientsin for the relief of the legations, and stop its advance.”

This proposal was greeted with tremendous applause, for everybody understood that it was made in the hope that the two “unpatriotic” mandarins would be killed in the attempt.

The Empress smiled again, thanked Kang I very sweetly for his suggestion, and promised him that it should be acted upon at once. The fatal resolution for “War to the Knife” seemed about to be carried. But the Emperor’s long sallow face suddenly purpled with emotion. He straightened his slight form, and spoke with dignity, though even in his passion, his voice remained monotonous and without carrying quality.

“August Mother, great and venerable Ancestress,” he said, turning towards the throne at his side. “Before bringing the Council to an end, I humbly beseech you to reconsider this dangerous decision to fight all the foreign nations. For such a movement once inaugurated will

make peace an impossibility in the future, and the destruction of the country imminent. Oh, let us pause before we hurl ourselves headlong into an abyss."

The Chinese officials who had pleaded for peace cried out in high approval at these imploring words, but the old Dowager deigned no other response than a frown and a renewal of her gesture of impatience. Encouraged by her displeasure, the Manchus began loudly to revile the Chinese of the opposition, who in their own turn grew furious.

"Traitors! Enemies!" they cried out upon each other with fierce gesticulations, their slant Tartar eyes blazing, their jewelled buttons flashing in the horizontal sunbeams. The Council broke up in a storm of mutual vituperation.

XVII

IN this Council of June 16th, the Manchu Generalissimo, Jung Lu, had kept silent. In truth his situation was now more than ever one which required nice balancing. For he had been appointed by the Empress on that very day "Guardian of the Legations" and his advice had been sought by the foreigners themselves as to the best positions for the Chinese soldiers in defending them. More than this, the throne had issued a decree informing the Yamen that soldiers had been ordered to patrol the city as a protection against the "bad characters" who were disturbing the peace. Some hours later, in the I Luan Hall, Jung Lu heard these same "bad characters" exalted up to the sky as "noble patriots and Public Harmony Braves." It was easy to understand that the Empress Dowager meant to continue her ambiguous policy to the last possible moment—stroking her intended victims with the velvet paw until the precise instant came when she should feel her claws sharp enough to begin her deadly scratching!

The General-in-chief was therefore in no haste to commit himself in this initial assembly. In the first place he was loath to antagonise the Chinese officials, who were now opposed to the Manchu policy, but upon whose final co-operation he counted. Then, as the newly-appointed Guardian of the Legations, it would have been scarcely becoming, even within the walled privacy of the palace, for him to urge a massacre of all the inmates of those same legations! But at heart he hated the foreigners and was as impatient as anyone for their extinction. It had cost him an effort three days before to turn away the doughty Sam Wang and his braves from Legation Street to the milder sport of

killing Catholics in the north of the city. And since that time other bands of Boxers had actually attacked the legations without interference on the part of the Manchu general. He recognised with keen enjoyment the ironic humour of his present Guardianship. To his Oriental mind his appointment to such a position seemed a proof of colossal cunning and wit on the part of the old Dowager.

For the nonce she had imposed silence upon him, but he was sure that she wished him soon to find a voice—if not his own, then one which should speak for him, and speak with authority. And what more authoritative voice could there be than that proceeding from a reincarnated heroine of history—the great Whar Mou Lahn herself? *She* should be his mouthpiece! The Commander-in-chief rubbed his hands with vast content as his idea developed within him.

She looked strangely bloodless, almost like an image in old wax, when a few days later, sitting erect in her scarlet robes on her red palanquin, she was borne into the Council Room. The stillness of her face was so unearthly that it imposed a kind of awe even upon the "Illustrious Patriot Ching Lin," who, arrayed as a mandarin in a long dragon-emblazoned tunic, and hat adorned with the sapphire button and peacock feathers, had summoned her from her far-off home "in the Eight Central Caves." His huge flat face paled a little as the eunuchs set the chair beside him in front of the throne. "Are we killing her?" he asked himself sharply.

As for the high potentates, the old Empress, the Emperor, and their grandees, they were breathless with superstitious fear when in answer to the supreme question: "Shall we now make war against the world?" uttered by the patriot in a low and compelling voice, the lips of the Goddess moved in answer. Slowly and monotonously, her words fell like icicles in a desolate and frozen place.

"From North and South, from East and West, the outer Barbarians have come to harass China. Together they hold evil councils, and plot that they may filch away little by little all our fair land and our harbours. With avaricious and malignant design, they come from across the sea to devour our substance and mock the gods. So I who was erstwhile the warrior-maiden Whar Mou Lahn, and am now a Goddess, have come quickly from the Central Southern Mountains to summon you all to vengeance."

Suddenly, at the word, the Goddess rose to her feet in the palanquin and fixed her eyes with a look of intense hatred upon Ching Lin.

"Vengeance!" she cried in an indescribable tone of self-mockery. "Ah, that is the fine word! That is what satisfies the soul!" Then quailing under the patriot's sudden and formidable scowl, she continued as one who achieves a rigmarole utterly devoid of sense. "I, Goddess of the Red Lantern Light, with Eight Million Spirit Soldiers in my train, command you, now, by the head of my father Kwanti, to revenge yourselves upon the foreign devils and drive them one and all into the sea!" She sat down again and instantly her lids dropped and her face resumed its old immobility.

But her words were greeted with a storm of applause. The Dowager half rose from her throne in her excitement.

"Aye! aye!" she cried, wagging her head until the jewels in her splendid coiffure gave forth a million coloured glints. "The Goddess has spoken. It is vengeance—war to the knife against the whole world."

The Manchu Generalissimo echoed her loudly, and all the other nobles and mandarins, both Chinese and Manchu, joined in without a single dissenting voice.

"Vengeance! War to the knife!"

Only the Emperor remained silent, his face grown ashen grey.

XVIII

SHE was given a palace, known as The Rotunda, with a retinue of eunuchs and tiring-women, and a little Manchu handmaiden from the Empress' own personal attendants, called Tsi Chu or "Purple Bamboo." The latter was a pretty and loving child, dressed in gay silks with a jewelled fillet about her forehead, who attached herself passionately to her new mistress and addressed her as "Goddess."

The Rotunda Palace is like a circular fort, situated just opposite the famous Marble Bridge which spans by a long and exquisitely graceful arch the moat before the Southern Gate of the Forbidden City. Entering the low gateway of the palace, one advances by a long incline to a high and wide terrace where there is a garden with century-old trees and little summer pavilions with glass walls set like fairy homes among fantastic rockeries and flower-pots. In the centre of the place rises a big enamelled pagoda sheltering an alabaster goddess in golden robes who meditates with drooping eyelids.

Here the reincarnated Whar Mou Lahn, dressed still in her red robes, walked with her handmaid, Tsi Chu, on the morning following her arrival in the Forbidden City. It was the twentieth day of June, and sultry even at this elevation. Standing by the pagoda, she let her gaze wander over the strange factitious landscape. In one direction, like a vast pink mirage, stretched the Imperial Lake of the Lotus, celebrated for centuries by Chinese poets, its surface almost covered by the great open calices of the flowers for which it is named. Above the trees on its shores, appeared the glittering roofs of other pavilions

and pagodas, each more fanciful than its neighbour. These, Tsi Chu explained, were retreats for the Imperial ladies, where, seated among silken cushions, they could embroider or drink tea to the sound of cithern and lute, while they looked at the pink lotus blossoms on the lake at their feet. The young Empress, Ye-Ho-Na-Lah, first wife of the Emperor, the little maid said, had a kiosk especially for herself, all yellow inside with wonderful things in ivory and gold and cloisonné. And sometimes the Emperor would go in there with her; but she never seemed happy, and was very thin. For it was the "Second Wife" who was loved the best.

Over against the lake lay the Violet City itself—an endless series of Imperial palaces, led up to by colossal avenues, but appearing from this high point like one great sea of faïence out of which, on the crest of steep gables, issued the horned heads of fabulous beasts. And enclosing them all about, doubly, triply, quadruply, as in some ever-narrowing prison, rose the palace walls!—walls within walls, a veritable labyrinth of hugh vermilion-coloured bulwarks surmounted by towers more ponderous and incomprehensible still. This was the Heart of Peking, the sacred and awful abode of the Son of Heaven!

The gazer sighed profoundly and moved as one suffering from an incurable weariness. The little handmaid hearing the sigh dropped to her knees.

"O glorious Goddess!" she said, "do not our palaces please you? Are they not beautiful enough?"

Her mistress had an odd smile at this, and answered in a tongue unknown to the maid. "Beautiful!—beautiful as vengeance and death!" she said and laughed aloud harshly.

The young girl shrank a little, then catching sight of a figure approaching through the trees, cried in sudden terror:

"Oh! the ugly Mandarin is coming—the new one I

dread, with the sapphire button and peacock feathers. Let us escape, honourable Goddess!"

Her mistress turned listlessly; then seeing who it was, stiffened and paled.

"Go into the pagoda and stay until I call you," she said in a low voice to Tsi Chu. "It is the Illustrious Patriot, Ching Lin, with whom I must converse alone."

The little maid, nothing loath, fled into the sanctuary and hid herself behind the alabaster image. The Mandarin advanced with long strides, the skirts of his wine-coloured silk robe straining at the knees. He was panting as he drew up before the pagoda, and the sweat rolled profusely from under his official hat. His eyes were alight with an indescribable gleam. In his hand he held a revolver.

"Mahlee!" he cried exultantly.

She gave one curious startled look at the weapon he carried, before she returned his greeting.

"Dr. Wang!"

Her voice was fearless, but he had followed her glance and burst into a ringing laugh.

"Don't be afraid! I'm not going to shoot you. If you get the better of me once with the help of fate, I hold you no grudge. Besides we've done all the shooting necessary this morning. And it's a fine enough bird we've brought down for the nonce. . . . It's off the programme for me to see you alone, I know, but I could not resist bringing you the great news in person. . . . His Excellency, Baron Von Ketteler, Minister of Germany to the Chinese Court, shot and killed, less than an hour ago on his way to the Tsung Li Yamen. How is that for a starter?" He gave another self-satisfied guffaw.

She uttered an inarticulate cry, then gasped. "You did that?"

He noted her shuddering disgust and laughed more coldly.

"Just *who* fired the shot is a state secret, my girl, which even you shall not know. But I can tell you this much: a Manchu guard was present and approved the shooting, and I was of that guard. And whoever did the actual killing, it's done, and well done. . . . I must say the temerity of the man was amazing. He and his interpreter left Legation Street in a sedan with absolutely no escort, and were visibly unarmed. A most touching faith in human nature, upon my soul! . . . He fell at the mouth of the Tsung Pu Alley—must have been killed instantly for he didn't budge from the chair. The bearers bolted, and the interpreter escaped by a miracle into the Methodist Mission though he appeared to be badly wounded."

With the recital, Sam Wang's excitement had risen again, and oblivious to his hearer's look, he burst out with renewed exultation:

"Yes, my girl, the irrevocable step is taken; the greatest international crime on record has just been committed. It is now, indeed, war to the knife!"

And in an excess of jubilation, as if throwing out a challenge to the whole world, he suddenly pointed his pistol upward into the air and fired.

The effect of the shot upon the young woman before him was like that which might have been produced by a dash of vitriol in her face. She clenched her hands in a vain effort at self-control, then broke out sharply:

"Go! go at once, if you don't wish to kill me!"

For a moment Sam Wang's bushy brows knitted in his redoubtable scowl, but it was only for a moment. At sight of her slight shaken figure and quivering face, strangely silhouetted against the big gaudy pagoda, he appeared to experience some change of emotion. Slowly his expression softened. Instead of withdrawing, he came nearer.

"Mahlee," he said in a low voice, "speak even now one word of love and I will give it all up."

Her surprise mastered her.

"You would give it up—for me!"

"Yes," he answered with the same low eagerness, "I will give it up, and we will go and live together in some undiscovered land a thousand leagues away."

For an appreciable instant their eyes met and her own grew less hard. What if after all, this were the right answer to her life riddle? She moved uneasily. Seeing his advantage, he approached still closer and, as once before, opened his huge arms to her. The gesture was fatal. The memory of that hideous night at the East Bell Street dispensary suddenly overwhelmed her, and she drew back shuddering.

"No! no!" she cried, shaking her head. "It is impossible—utterly, forever impossible!"

His scowl lowered again. But without another word, he swept off his peacock-plumed hat, bowed like a cavalier, and went away through the old trees.

As soon as he was gone, the girl put her hands to her throat as one who suffers from strangulation.

"Tsi Chu! Tsi Chu!" she called.

The little maid came running out of the pagoda with round alarmed eyes. From her hiding-place she had seen the shooting into the air, but true to her training, asked no questions.

"Tell the eunuchs to prepare a sedan," her mistress commanded, "I am suffocating here and must go out on the streets awhile."

"Yes, Glorious Goddess."

XIX

SHE was possessed by the same wild unrest which had sent her into the streets on the day of the coming of the Boxers, and now, as then, she had no idea whither she wished to go. Only one question had been reiterating itself in the back of her mind since her last visit to the Ark of the Covenant which she had left burning behind her: Where were the missionaries? Where was Andrew Handel?

Doubtless Jung Lu and Sam Wang knew, but even if she had had the opportunity, she would have been too proud to ask them. She was certain, however, that the missionaries had not left the city, as all exit had long since been shut off by the Boxers and the Imperial troops.

She was aware, indeed, of the treacherous offers of escort out of Peking which had been made to the Foreign Legations by the Throne. But she knew also, to her infinite secret relief, that these offers had been refused. If her jealous passion, together with the thought of the wrongs which fate had imposed upon her, had more than once stirred the Tartar blood in her veins to the fierce tune of "vengeance," she had no lust for cold massacre. She abhorred the thought of anything less than a "fair game," as Sam Wang once promised it should be. The cowardly assassination of the German Minister had revolted every instinct of her soul.

Yet she was one of the Boxers now—their Goddess—their Whar Mou Lahn—the Jeanne d'Arc of China! She had given her oath of fealty to the cause of driving every foreigner into the sea, as the glib formula went. Ill or well she had chosen sides. Again and again, she

repeated to herself: "I have a great motive in life—a mighty mission to fulfil."

But once on the streets in her sedan, she felt like a rudderless boat on the waves, driven by the wind and tossed. Her one unreasoning desire was to know whether Andrew Handel and the other missionaries had found a refuge. A phrase in Sam Wang's story of the murder of Baron Von Ketteler came to her. . . . "The interpreter escaped into the Methodist Mission." She knew the compound of this mission to be a large enclosure about half a mile distant from Legation Street. It could accommodate many missionaries and Chinese Christians in case there were need for mutual protection, and it had the advantage of being close to the foreign ambassadors. A sudden idea flashed into her mind. It was to this place that the members of the Ark of the Covenant had doubtless fled. And Andrew was with them! A bitter but overwhelming longing to look once more upon his face mastered her.

She gave an order to her bearers to take her to the Filial Piety Alley in which the Methodist Mission lay. Her hope was that she might catch a glimpse of him through the gate. But as it chanced, she had no sooner turned into the lane than she saw him!

He was walking slowly behind a small body of American marines at the head of some hundred and thirty Chinese school girls, who were in turn followed by a large number of native women and children, all carrying burdens of food and clothing. A large band of Chinese men and boys, also loaded with bundles, came after; then a number of German marines bearing a wounded man on a stretcher. A group of missionaries, men, women and children, brought up the rear.

Mahlee understood instantly the meaning of the procession. As she had guessed, all the Protestant missionaries in Peking had come together into the Methodist station, as a means of guarding themselves

against the fanatical Boxers. But now that a Manchu guard had fired on a foreign Minister, war was understood to be formally declared between China and the world, and all foreign civilians had been ordered into the Legation quarters for more sufficient protection. The wounded man on the stretcher was undoubtedly the German interpreter who had accompanied Baron Von Ketteler and "escaped by a miracle." The Chinese Christians had been allowed to follow.

Mahlee spoke to her bearers through a crack in the curtains of her sedan.

"Stop here, close to the wall on the right. I wish to see these people pass."

Pass! The word had the echo of fate. Passing—passing onward out of her life for ever—the man whom she loved! He was directly in front of her now, and so near that if she had opened the curtains and extended her arm she might almost have touched him. Involuntarily, she leaned towards him, pressing her forehead to the narrow aperture. She could see his pale eyes rest vaguely for a moment on the closed sedan. Some slight obstruction in the narrow street even caused him to pause. He turned and said some reassuring word to the flock of frightened girls behind him. Then, as the street cleared before the marines, he passed gravely on, the sunshine lighting the dull blonde of his hair to a halo of pale gold. In another instant he had turned the corner of the alley and was lost to her sight. She felt her heart sink like a dead thing within her, yet as one rendered incapable of other occupation, still continued gazing between the crack of the curtains.

She watched, as through a blur, the strange procession file past: The school girls, scared, yet quiet and composed; the women, the children, the men and the boys with calm stoical faces—Chinese Christians, all, whom their spiritual leaders would not abandon in this hour of danger. And last, the missionaries them-

selves, brave, with the courage of the pure and righteous, even smiling a little at the grotesque figures they made with their queer unwieldy bundles. In this group Mahlee saw the other members of the Ark of the Covenant:—Mrs. Parmelee, weighed down with children's clothes, walking beside her husband, who trundled a bicycle; their young son, looking very manly and determined between his two little yellow-haired sisters whom he had grasped tightly by the hand; and hobbling along with them, their small-footed Chinese nurse; behind the family, the three "ladies"—Claribel McGinnis with her arm lovingly entwined in that of her sturdy friend, Dr. Eliza, and one or two steps back—pathetically detached from these two—Miss Dorn, prim even in this terribly uncertain hour. All these she had known—had lived with intimately in the daily companionship of mission work. And now one and all were passing to almost certain destruction.

As the rear of the procession rounded the head of the alley and turned into the Ha-Ta Great Street, thence to file into the legations, like rats into a trap, a strange silence fell upon the numerous spectators. There was no sign of triumph on the faces of these Orientals, but only a profound impassiveness almost like the impassiveness of Nature before a *fiat* of doom.

It was only after the procession had quite disappeared that Mahlee was startled from the sick spell which held her by sharp cruel cries. Several men with red sashes had darted out from some invisible lurking-place and caught a white-haired Chinese gentleman who had been vainly trying to overtake the missionaries. Mahlee opened the curtains wider and looked; and then gave a cry of surprise in recognising the venerable native teacher who had taught her the Chinese classics. And now, before she could intervene, something terrible happened. One of the red-sashed fellows struck the old

man a resounding blow on the back with the hilt of his sword and brought him to his knees.

"Are you a Christian?" he yelled into his ear savagely.

Mahlee held her breath. She knew that the old teacher had never up to this time made an open confession of his faith. But something in his countenance now frightened her. Was he going to choose this fatal opportunity to acknowledge Christ?

"Since you ask me," he said in a clear and steady voice, "I cannot deny it; I am a Christian."

With a cry of hatred the Boxers rushed on him, and the next instant Mahlee saw the blood spurting red from his heart.

She turned away her eyes, sick to the soul. O God! O God! was this the colour of her vengeance?

But the next moment she heard a familiar female voice protesting in shrill falsetto:

"No! no! not I! I am no Christian. I am only a poor old woman who worships the gods faithfully, burning joss sticks every day. Spare me, good sirs, spare me!"

It was Huang-ma, the old crone reconverted to heathenism, who had been Mahlee's servant at East Bell Street.

"Go then!" she heard the Boxers say. "But if ever we catch you with any of the Christians we will hack you to pieces."

She saw the poor creature flutter from their grasp like a scared hen. Leaning out, Mahlee spoke again to her chair-bearers.

"Bring that woman to me," she commanded.

Astonished, but obedient, the eunuchs took her up and tossed her into the sedan.

Mahlee went back to the palace with the old crone crouching at her feet.

XX

PRECISELY at the stroke of four on that same afternoon, the troops of General Tung Fu Hsiang opened fire on the Austrian Embassy, and the famous Siege of the Legations in Peking which for almost two months was destined to hold the world horror-struck, began.

These first assailants were no others than those "terrible legions" from the wild west of Kansu of whom Lady Jung's visitors had spoken with bated breath some months before. As a close second to them, appeared the troops of Jung Lu, who, obedient to a special Degree of the Throne, began to pour in to the city with their field and machine guns and an exhaustless supply of the latest improved magazine rifles. And last, Sam Wang, who had with difficulty kept his Boxer hounds in the northern quarters of the city, now loosed them on the legations.

Mahlee had not been back in the palace an hour before she heard, with a sudden return of her sick faintness, the opening thunders of the fusillade. She was told by one of the Imperial eunuchs, a tall fellow named Wu, who had been sent to her with a basket of rare fruit and the compliments of the old Empress, that during her absence another Council had been held in which the Emperor, much disturbed by the news of Baron Von Ketteler's murder, had made a second pitiful plea for delay before embarking upon the ruinous policy of war. But he had been again overruled by the Dowager and Prince Tuan, father of the Heir Apparent and President of the Tsung Li Yamen, who had treated the poor Son of Heaven with such stinging contempt that he had

left the hall weeping. Immediately following this, Jung Lu's soldiers, waiting outside the northern walls of the city, had been ordered into Peking.

Mahlee thought that she detected in Wu's face as he told this news, a secret relish only partially hidden by his grave manner. Indeed, the fact of his daring to relate the incident of the council chamber at all, she felt to be significant; amongst the several thousand eunuchs in the palace there might not be a few who were watching with inward delight this edifying spectacle of the "Sacred Persons" at odds!

Certainly in the wild orgie of looting and murder which immediately followed the entrance of these diverse and ill-governed troops into the capital, the worst fears of the Emperor gave promise of being speedily realised. Judging from the accounts which came pouring into the palace at every hour during the next few days, Peking had become a veritable Bedlam. The Kansu soldiery, a rabble of ill-favoured ruffians, wandered unchecked about the city, not hesitating to pillage even the homes of officials of the highest grade; and the troops of Jung Lu were in no way behind them in such exploits. Every one who wore the red sash and head cloth of the I Ho Ch'uan appeared to hold a high licence to kill, burn, and loot *ad libitum*. Many of the very mandarins who had cried out so lustily for war had their palaces completely denuded of everything portable, and those who made the least resistance were summarily dispatched, until it was said, that the streets of Peking, like those of Paris under the Commune, ran with blood.

Mahlee listened to these stories with a half cynical indifference. What did she care about the fate of mandarins' bric-a-brac or even of mandarins' heads! They had brought upon themselves their own punishment, and it was almost an alleviation to her own peculiar misery to hear of these would-be-trappers who had been caught in their own snares.

But what of the legations? That was not a matter to leave her untouched! She learned that the immense compounds of the different embassies, eight of which were situated on Legation Street running parallel to the great Tartar Wall, had been thrown into one great area with the British Legation, standing somewhat back of the others and sheltered by them, for its heart; and that by almost superhuman exertion on the part of the besieged the whole region had been strongly barricaded and was in a fair way to hold out for several weeks.

For several weeks! And then what? The girl shuddered with wretchedness, but would not allow herself to think. That moral paralysis which had come upon her as she watched the procession of missionaries and Chinese Christians still held her in its grip. But when rumours of a different sort began to fill the palace—when it became bandied about that an army of foreigners was advancing from the Taku Forts for the relief of the besieged—not the Seymour Expedition which had been forced to return—but a far vaster assembly representing all the great World Powers, she felt her heart suddenly lift itself in a dumb agonised prayer that they might arrive in time.

On the third day after her street adventures, the eunuch Wu came again to the Rotunda to conduct "The Goddess" into the presence of his Imperial mistress. She followed him through some great gateways piercing the vermilion-coloured walls, and across several large avenues and quadrangles before entering at last the courtyard of the Dowager's palace. She had never been here before, and was struck with the old-world beauty of the place. The court was spacious, yet not so vast as to destroy the sense of seclusion—a kind of large intimacy of silence which was less disturbed than augmented by the soft moaning of doves settled, one

knew not precisely where, in the branches of ancient trees and the eaves of the great sloping yellow roofs. Mahlee was conscious of passing by priceless porcelains and bronzes—courtyard ornaments in the shape of huge urns and incense burners, crouching lions, and the Imperial dragon and phoenix, all bathed in summer sunlight.

Then at Wu's touch, immense folding doors slid back on their hinges, and the girl found herself in the Throne Room of the Empress Dowager. She paused with an exclamation of awe. Her first sensation was that of being in the interior of a colossal jewel in which all detail was lost in a subdued glow of colour. It was scarcely past noonday, and the light fell in intersecting shafts through high-coloured windows set below a great and gorgeous dome. But this radiance left almost entirely untouched the recesses of the room which remained in obscurity, and threw out on the air a hostile dampness exuded from the black marble floor and the blood-coloured walls.

The girl, touched by the chill, shivered as she went through the hall after the eunuch. She had just time to make out a great Double-Dragon throne at one side of the room similar to that used by the Empress in the Council chamber, before Wu, previous to withdrawing, lifted the padded satin portières in front of an interior door, and Mahlee passed into the "Sitting Room" of the Dowager.

The elegant old woman, who seemed at first glance to be alone, advanced with a smile to meet her guest, holding out her beautiful little hands from her great silken sleeves in a welcome seemingly as artless as that of a child. As Mahlee came towards her, she was conscious of a strange perfume like the exhalation of unknown flowers. It must have been the quintessence of everything delicate and rare, yet it produced in her some indefinable repugnance not counteracted by the insinu-

"Welcome, Goddess of the Red Lantern Light, destined Saviour of our country," he said, in a voice of such singular sweetness, and with an enunciation so pure, that she wondered how a being of such uncompromising aspect could possess so musical an organ of speech.

Yet she felt in the music a concealed irony, albeit indulgent rather than ill-humoured, as if he would say: "I have spent my life in mummeries to please this old Dame. Let me carry this one through, also, with good grace."

At a second nod from the Empress, he opened a sandal-wood chest and took out a splendid crimson tunic embroidered in gold with the battle of the Chimæras, a pair of high-soled Manchu shoes of red satin studded with gems, and a head-dress adorned with a magnificent pearl and ruby of twin size. As he lifted this gorgeous apparel, it caught the sunlight and threw out such a dazzling brightness that Mahlee uttered a little cry of astonishment.

The old Empress, hearing it, clapped her hands like a delighted child.

"They are all for you!" she exclaimed. "Your regalia of war to wear, when, like the heroic Whar Mou Lahn of old, you go out to battle with the enemy. Condescend, O Glorious Goddess, to be adorned as becometh your divinity."

Mahlee stepped forward, her heart swelling with a strange pride which even then was half ironical. How sumptuously was her old dream being fulfilled! Forsooth, a "great *tai-tai*," with Imperial hands to wait upon her! For when the eunuch Li Lien Ying had clothed the girl in the glittering tunic and shoes, the Dowager herself fastened the jewelled head-dress above her brow over her heavy black braids. Yet her Majesty's voice was not without a touch of condescension, suitable to the "Old Buddha," equipping a minor goddess.

"This," she said, touching the pearl, "is the Flaming Pearl of our Dynasty, eternal quest of the Dragon, symbol of the unattainable. I present it to you now, to quicken your zeal in the interests of our country. And this," she continued, indicating the ruby, "I have selected as a fitting emblem for the Red Lantern Light Society of which you are the divine patroness."

Mahlee bowed gravely in acknowledgment of these gifts, and the Empress stepped back to admire their effect. Her black eyes sparkled with complete satisfaction.

"The moon is obscured, flowers are put to shame. The fish sink dazzled to the bottom of the river," she murmured in ecstasy. Then turning again to Li Lien Ying: "Go," she said, "ask the ladies to come in, and also bring something to eat and drink."

In a few minutes the room was filled with the court ladies dressed in soft gaudy silks, led by the young Empress, Ye-Ho-Na-Lah, and the "secondary wife" of the Emperor. The former was a grave-looking patrician with a face as narrow and sallow as her Imperial husband's and something touchingly sad in her dark oblique eyes. As she entered she bowed with gentle dignity towards the figure upon the divan, and then immediately took a place in the back of the room. The "secondary wife," a good-natured young person, who had once had the reputation of being extremely beautiful, but was now grown very stout, fixed full-orbed childish eyes of wonder upon the reincarnated Heroine, and smiled with a naïve but somewhat timid pleasure. Indeed, in spite of Mahlee's courteous replies to their salutations, all the ladies appeared a little overawed, and it was only when the old Dowager bade them set before the great Whar Mou Lahn food and drink that they quite recovered their equanimity. They then broke out into smiles and pretty flattering remarks upon the Heroine's marvellous beauty; while two of them placed a small red lacquered

table before the divan, and the others came with exotic sweetmeats and preserves, dishes of sharks' fins, birds' nests, a stew of hind's nerves, and a salad of flag-flowers. But the Heroine had scarcely tasted of this repast when Li Lien Ying, who had not returned with the ladies, entered brusquely.

"The Hanlin Academy is on fire," he said with an odd intonation, addressing the Empress Dowager.

The announcement was the signal for the utmost dismay. The old Empress turned white as a sheet and grasped the eunuch's arm roughly.

"My Imperial Academy!" she exclaimed. "Who has done this evil deed?"

"The noble patriots of the I Ho Ch'uan," he answered, not without a touch of irony. "As the buildings of the Hanlin stand but a little way north of the British Legation, they no doubt set fire to them with the hope of catching the foreign devils. Already the library is in flames."

The Dowager burst into tears. "The library!" she cried. "All those great works of antiquity gone! Alas! alas! this is too great a calamity. Could they not have used other means to catch the foreigners without sacrificing the most valuable books in China?"

She wept for several minutes, while her ladies pressed about her with consoling words. Mahlee summoned with a glance the eunuch to her side.

"Are the foreign embassies likely to catch fire?" she asked him in a low, quick voice.

He looked at her curiously.

"They are in great danger; the wind is blowing the flames towards them."

The words were complacent, but they brought the Heroine to her feet. Her face had gone quite pale and her hands met convulsively.

"I will go out and see!" she said.

The Dowager also arose, and brushing away the tears energetically from her eyes, cried:

"Yes, let us all go and see. 'When the feathers of a phoenix are united to the liver of a chicken, it is hard to accomplish results.' I will therefore weep no longer. After all, the Public Harmony Braves have done wisely. Even our venerable Academy is not too great a price to pay for destroying the hateful foreigners. We will go and see them burn."

There was a cruel ring in her voice which maddened Mahlee, but she was forced to hold her peace.

Even from the Dowager's courtyard the sky looked red; but at the eunuch's suggestion, they all went to the esplanade of the Rotunda palace for a better view. Here the fire appeared like a magnificent holocaust. Incendiaries of varying magnitudes had occurred ever since the entrance of the Boxers, the greatest of which had been the burning of a large portion of the Chinese City with one of the enormous *lou* or square towers of the Ch'ien gate, but the present blaze, as Mahlee could see, was closer than any previous one to the legations. And as the eunuch had said, the wind was blowing the flames directly toward the foreign quarter.

At the spectacle, the girl's heart again sent out its dumb agonised cry.

But the old Dowager, at her side, was exultant.

"We have them now, O great Whar Mou Lahn!" she cried. "See those high tongues of flame. They will devour them soon; they can not escape! Yes, yes, they are doomed! It is worth my Academy!"

In their gorgeous tunics and headdresses, surrounded by the court ladies, the pair looked like two queens of some fabulous era, the one old and inexorable, filled with a transport of vindictive joy; the other young and beautiful, with a face stricken by a wordless terror and grief.

The "Sham Eunuch" watched them with his sunken eyes of an old hawk, and smiled curiously to himself.

Then the miracle happened: the wind suddenly

shifted, and the flames from the Imperial Academy were blown away from the legation quarter.

When she saw this, the old Empress began to weep again with exasperation.

"My ancient academy gone, and all to no purpose!" she cried. "I shall certainly have those wicked incendiaries who set fire to it beheaded."

But the face of the younger watcher had suddenly grown calm. And when she took leave of the old Empress a little smile, half cynical, half triumphant, played about her lips.

XXI

As Mahlee entered her bed-chamber in the palace of the Rotunda, her little handmaid Tsi Chu approached her with a distressed face.

"O honourable Goddess," she said, bowing low, "that old woman you brought home three days ago is sick and keeps crying for you. Will you go to see her?"

Mahlee at once consented, and after changing her brilliant clothes for some less conspicuous, was led by the young girl to the quarter occupied by the tiring-women, where in a small room somewhat apart from the others, Huang-ma lay groaning upon a *kang*.

The old crone raised herself on her elbow as her mistress entered, and turned upon her bleary suspicious eyes. For although she had been calling for Mahlee with querulous insistence, she was greatly confused by the latter's new state. In her dim brain such sudden transfer to the Imperial abode smacked strongly of magic, so that at sight of the girl she began a nervous fumbling in her bosom for an amulet she had hidden there as a charm against the Evil Eye. Mahlee's familiar greeting, however, quickly dissipated her alarm; yet as soon as Tsi Chu had withdrawn, the old woman burst into tears.

"I am but an old-age peach dropped into flour-soup—a good-for-nothing egg," she cried. "Alas! that I was ever born."

Mahlee sat down by her side.

"What has brought on these evil vapours, Huang-ma?" she asked kindly.

"What has brought them on?" the other echoed

"You are sure of the name, Huang-ma?"

"What name?" asked the old woman fretfully; she had begun to groan again.

"The name of the foreign mandarin—the lover of Yueh Woa," Mahlee said with the same hoarse articulation.

"Yes, Seer Pheelip Sackville," Huang-ma repeated. "I am absolutely sure. Dearly enough did I pay for my knowledge, too, for Madame Ling soon began to act like a corpse come to life because of it—threatened to pull out my tongue, and finally forced my husband and me to leave the neighbourhood. After that everything went like 'pulling the elbow'; my husband died of cholera—all my children proved ungrateful. It was only the missionaries who were kind to me. Yet now I am worse off than if I had never known them, for I have denied their Gesu and must perish in my sins."

She began to cry again miserably, then suddenly clenched her old fist and shook it in the air.

"It's all the fault of that child of a monkey, Sam Wang," she cried. "But I say again as I have said before; a fish sports in the kettle, but his life will not be long."

Mahlee rose; her old schooling in self-control was serving her now. She betrayed no emotion; she merely tempered the light, straightened the quilts on the *kang*, and promised to mix Huang-ma some medicine and send in one of the tiring-women to wait upon her.

Once alone in her great palace bed-chamber, the girl threw back her head in a superb gesture.

"Sir Philip Sackville, my father! Blanche Sackville, my sister!" she cried with an indescribable accent of pride, defiance, and scorn.

Then suddenly she became conscious again of the fierce Chinese cannon fire which jarred the air in a series of sharp concussions. She bent forward listening. And as she listened, a new and singular pallor rising as it

seemed from the hidden recesses of her heart, slowly conquered her face. Her father, her sister, Andrew Handel—all these whom she might have loved best in life, were shut into that death-trap! At this moment she felt no jealousy. She forgot the intolerable pain which had visited her at the thought that Andrew and Blanche were together. Now something more elemental was stirring within her—the call of her blood to its own! An immense yearning, more poignant, more passionate than all else she had ever experienced, came upon her. This was the desire to look upon her father's face.

XXII

Rumours of the approaching Allies increased. It was said that thirty thousand foreign troops from Taku had already arrived at Tientsin, only eighty miles away, had relieved the situation there (for that city, itself, had been in a state of siege), and were now preparing for an immediate advance upon the capital. In fact, the news of the rescue of the foreign community at Tientsin had reached the Empress Dowager on the very day when she had watched the burning of her beloved Academy, and had greatly augmented her ill-humour. Since then, Councils had multiplied; alarm had reached a height; and the upshot had been that on the 14th of July the Tsung Li Yamen had sent a dispatch to the legations, urging all the foreign ambassadors, their families, and their staffs to avail themselves of its proffered escort of trustworthy officers giving "close and strict protection," to repair immediately to the Yamen, where they should "temporarily reside pending future arrangements for their return home, in order to preserve friendly relations from beginning to end."

The truth is that even the most rabid of the Manchu officials had begun to realise that if a general massacre of foreign Ministers were permitted, China would be forced to expiate the deed with Imperial blood. But the dispatch made no reference whatever to the missionaries and the two thousand and more native Christians within the foreign barricades, of whose very existence, it might be inferred, the Chinese government was in total ignorance.

The reply to this extraordinary invitation came quickly and was in the following sense: The Ministers

see no reason for removing to the Tsung Li Yamen. If it is really desired to open negotiations, a trustworthy messenger should be sent with a white flag.

More councils followed, fresh despatches were sent; news came that the great General Nieh, a favourite of the Empress, had committed suicide in consequence of a terrible defeat which he had sustained in fighting the foreigners between Tientsin and Taku. The old Dowager wept and sent for the reincarnated Whar Mou Lahn. Her Majesty showed a face haggard, but still sufficiently spirited even in the midst of her lamentations.

"The foreign devils are getting the better of us at every point," she cried out peevishly, as if it were the Heroine's fault. "My good General Nieh has killed himself, and now half Europe is advancing upon us with hideous yells of triumph and unimaginable cruelties. Even here in Peking the besieged manage to kill hundreds of our men, and not fewer among the invulnerable Boxers than the others. What, pray, are we to do now?"

The girl, whose heart was beating fast with a secret hope of her own, gave council in a deciding voice.

"Declare a truce immediately, O Great Ancestress," she said. "Select a trustworthy messenger as the foreigners themselves have suggested—some one will volunteer!—and send him with a white flag to their lines. This will, at least, give us time for further councils, and will also enable our soldiers to examine the enemies' fortifications, which, in a case of a renewal of the fight, will prove a great advantage."

As the Heroine's advice was in exact accord with the voice of the whole Tsung Li Yamen, and of the Emperor (though the latter counted but little), the Empress Dowager was fain to accept it. True, she wanted to know sharply enough what so many "invulnerable" Boxers, with a Goddess, a Great Fairy, and

Eight Million Spirit Soldiers to assist them, could be about to find so much trouble in ridding the country of a few thousand foreign devils and their Ministers. But she did not press the question when she was told that if too much haste were shown in despatching the Ministers her own skin would be in danger. That reflection put a new note of prudence into her voice and made her agree to the armistice.

Li Lien Ying, her Sham Eunuch, who stood by, turned aside once to smile.

The day after this decision was made, the Tsung Li Yamen received a cipher telegram in the code of the State Department of Washington, addressed to the American Minister. This dispatch, though unintelligible to the Manchu and Chinese officials, caused them no little satisfaction, as its safe delivery would furnish a reasonable pretext for the truce now desired by all. Indeed, by this time, the only Mandarin in the court circle who, by some common instinct of the others, had been left in the dark as to the intended armistice, was the "Illustrious Patriot," Ching Lin, whose constant occupation, at the actual scene of strife had kept him for many days from the palace.

XXIII

TOWARDS five o'clock in the afternoon of the 16th of July, an unusual commotion became manifest outside the eastern barricades of the foreign legations. The Patriot, Ching Lin, in his habiliments of Boxer chief, riding upon his big mule with scarlet trappings, was superintending the removal of one of the cannon to a place at some distance further north. His commands, given in a tongue unknown to the common soldiery, were addressed to two lieutenants, who in turn passed them on in Chinese to their subordinates.

"Unhook it from the fore-carriage, Sing, you big devil, and you, Chung, tie a second rope about its nozzle. There!—haul slowly—is it loose? Now run!"

In a moment the big iron monster was moving at a lively trot between two rows of soldiers running in unison. The commander on the black mule drew his huge hand across his mouth, rubbing away the sweat and dust. He appeared well satisfied.

"It's been a good day's work," he remarked to Sing, who had remained behind. "They're burying two men over in there this minute"—he indicated the foreign ramparts—"to whom I had the pleasure of giving their dose of lead, and one of them is no other than the British captain who has given us so much trouble for the last fortnight. He'll make a big hole in their force."

The young giant's answering grin was a trifle uneasy. For a moment he was silent, then burst out impulsively: "Sam, don't you ever sicken—have any compunctions—in all this business?"

He made a sweeping gesture with his arm, embracing the scene before them. In truth, it was worthy of the

brush of a Verestchagin. On one side, extended the grim line of the old Tartar Wall which had been taken by the foreigners only after a fierce struggle, but which now formed their extreme southern defence. Built high and massive by the great conqueror Kublai Khan, it had the air of dominating its surroundings with a savage and haughty barbarism. Around from it, about a great irregular circle enclosing the legations, the fighting had been persistent. The Chinese barricades were pushed up as close as possible to those of their enemy and the zone between now showed an unsightly desolation. Broken firearms and empty cartridge shells by the thousands mingled with the bricks and woodwork of ruined native houses; while from hideous evil-smelling rags, black with flies, protruded skulls and bones and pieces of decaying flesh, representing all that was left of scores of the "invulnerable" Boxers who had approached too close to the foreigners' defence-fire. Among this vile debris, pariah dogs wandered at will, sniffing continuously.

But if the Patriot were moved by this spectacle it was scarcely to remorse. The scowl that he turned on his companion was not good to see.

"To Hell with your compunctions, you time-serving lout."

The big fellow shrank at the brutality of the tone. If the exigencies of war had united the "Devil's Tripletlets" in Devil's work, it was evident that one of them had not forgotten that he had a score to settle against the other two. Next moment both men were pricking their ears in amazement at the sudden hoarse blare of a trumpet—a trumpet of truce!

At the sound of it, the rifle-fire and cannonading, which up to this time had been constant, gradually fell off; soldiers who a moment before had been mingled in the confusion of the fight, collected in groups, and then in whole divisions, making separate masses of colour

against the grey bulwarks. This movement, which was almost mechanical, took but a few minutes, and at the end of it a strange silence filled with a mutual curiosity and distrust fell upon the contended region.

Motionless upon his big black mule, the Patriot's first expression had been one of astonished perplexity, which quickly gave place to anger so extreme that the visage of Kwan-ti, the war-god, would at that moment have appeared mild by comparison. Then suddenly Sing heard him give a great gasp, followed by a hard heaving of his enormous chest.

"She!" The word came out like the sharp hiss of a projected bullet.

Sing turned. He saw a slight figure dressed in the blue cotton garments of a common Chinese boy advance between the parted soldiery, waving a white flag. Sing also recognised that face! As the boy came on, steadily, unhesitatingly, preceded by the loud trumpeteer of truce, heads began to appear above the foreign barricades, handkerchiefs were waved in response to the flag, even faint hurrahs could be heard. The lad continued to the north and west until he had reached the stone bridge at the upper end of the Imperial Canal, which running at right angles to Legation Street was included in its lower length within the foreign area. Here he took his stand, still waving the flag. Presently, a second figure was perceived approaching the bridge from the direction of the British legation.

This person was also waving something white. In another moment the two figures, now faint in the distance, had met and disappeared together within the foreign lines.

The stillness which had held the Chinese soldiery during the the boy's advance, suddenly broke. There were cries of excitement; many even burst out in ejaculations of joy and relief at the thought that the war was ended. Sing looked back to the spot where

his chief had been a moment before. He was no longer there ; the big black mule was carrying him at a gallop towards the stone bridge over which the boy had passed. Then the animal suddenly drew up to a standstill on the bridge and its rider remained outlined against the sky like a guard in waiting. Sing knew that the "Illustrious Patriot" was watching for the reappearance of the messenger of truce.

XXIV

WITHIN a few yards of the British Legation the boy, following the Chinese Christian who had met him, drew a strip of cloth from a pocket and wrapped it about his head in such a fashion as to conceal all of his face save his eyes. Then he entered with his companion through the gate, opened cautiously to admit them. In another moment an eager crowd of men, women and children were pressing around him.

He delivered the cipher telegram from Washington, which proved scarcely less meaningless here than at the Tsung Li Yamen; what held far more interest for the besieged was the intelligence personally conveyed that their Imperial Majesties, as well as both Manchu and Chinese officials, desired an armistice to see whether "peaceful relations could not be again established."

The boy's message was received with varying comment and not without suspicion. There was, however, nothing of the latter quality in the tones of one pretty plump little woman whose voice rose above the others.

"Oh! how perfectly sweet of them! Of course we'll consent. The babies will have all the milk they want again, and we'll have some human food ourselves."

"Human food! you little cannibal! Are you going to devour the Boxers?"

If Miss McGinnis' face was a trifle less round and rosy than before the siege, it did not fail to break into dimples at Dr. Eliza's question.

"It would just serve them right!" she retorted, "and they couldn't be much worse than pony meat. . . . I wonder why the boy keeps his face wrapped up. Perhaps he has the toothache, poor thing! Oh, here're

the Parmeleees and Miss Dorn! Isn't it just great news, my good friends? But where's Mr. Handel?"

At this instant, the messenger of truce turned squarely about and looked at the missionaries.

"Mr. Handel was put into the hospital last night with orders to stay flat on his back for a week," Mr. Parmelee replied briskly.

The ladies looked distressed.

"Is he wounded?"

"Not lately. But he's been exerting himself out of all proportion to his strength, and the old wound he got in Shantung is giving him trouble."

"He's starving!" Dr. Kennedy cried. "There's nothing else in the world the matter with him. He'll scarcely eat for fear the supply will run short for the others. He's acted that way from the first day. But now there's an armistice, perhaps we can manage to get fresh eggs and fruit for him. That's all he needs."

At the doctor's last words, the young messenger drew a sigh which seemed to express some inward relief. Soon the crowd about him began to melt away, separating into little groups to discuss the new situation. Left to himself, his eyes, visible between a slit of the cloth which otherwise completely enveloped his head, moved among the foreigners with a restless searching insistence. He saw that many of them looked thin and haggard, the young children especially, who had been deprived of proper food. It was clear, too, that the present news had not brought unalloyed hope. The legation ambassadors, with a deep look of responsibility graven on their faces, talked among themselves, while the other men drew about them as soldiers about their chiefs. The women and children made separate clusters. One and all, down to the smallest child, wore the same air of determination to face bravely whatever hardships or dangers the future might present.

Suddenly the boy's eyes, which had not ceased their

quest, flashed as they fell upon a fair-haired English girl who had turned to follow a tall middle-aged man. In a few leaps he had crossed the distance between them.

"Miss Sackville!"

As she turned at the shock of the voice, he let the cloth fall from his face, so that, for a second, it was quite uncovered.

"Mahlee!" she gasped.

"Yes, Mahlee!" the other echoed. "It is I. I have something to say to you and to your father."

The Eurasian waited a moment to let the English girl recover herself, meanwhile drawing the cloth again over her head. But Blanche Sackville looked bewildered and a little frightened.

"To us alone?"

"Alone, and immediately." There was something at once eager and imperious in the tone which brooked no refusal.

"I will speak to my father," Miss Sackville replied hastily. "Wait there in that room." She pointed out a lobby in one of the buildings of the legation compound.

Mahlee crossed over to it and stood waiting within the threshold. The lobby was evidently used for a barrack-room. Muskets were stacked in a corner, while two or three mattresses with rough soldiers' blankets occupied a portion of the floor space. From the door she saw Blanche Sackville overtake her father. He had joined the group around the ambassadors and was engaging one of them in conversation, so that he had not missed his daughter. Mahlee followed the movements of the young girl as she drew him away from the group and spoke to him with rapid gesticulations. Even at the distance she was the Eurasian heard her own name pronounced and detected the sharp start that Sir Philip Sackville gave as he involuntarily echoed it. She saw

him turn, advance a little hesitatingly, then looking doubtfully at his daughter, hesitate again, as if he were on the point of dismissing her. But apparently he thought better of that, for he came forward with her once again, yet slowly, and with a visible effort. Mahlee felt her heart throb violently. This man was her father! She could see that he was still in his prime, carrying his unusual height with military erectness; and, as he drew nearer, she observed that his features were very handsome, though a trifle over-sharpened. As he reached the door he threw his arm about his daughter with an odd protecting gesture, and together they entered the room.

XXV

THE next instant Sir Philip Sackville was bending with a low bow towards the Eurasian as one who had just been presented to a great lady. And, in truth, no woman of title and position could have borne herself with a prouder air, at the moment of his entrance, than this slender creature dressed in the poor clothes of a Chinese Coolie, with thick black hair clinging in disordered masses about her head and neck. She returned his salutation with a grave bow of her own; and as he raised his head again their eyes met.

Her own were opened largely in a slow, intense gaze, as if for the moment the power of words was gone from her, and she must trust to her eyes alone to convey to him the meanings of her soul. He looked into them curiously, and as he looked, felt uncontrollably shaken. They were the eyes of his own youth! They held something uncompromising which said: I will have all or nothing. He recognised that look! But behind their defiant pride he saw, too, with an inward shiver, that they were pleading with him—pleading for life.

Unable to bear that great appeal, he turned away his head, and it was Blanche Sackville who finally broke the silence. She had been struck by the oddness of this meeting—its almost solemn note which had held her mute for several minutes. Now she cried in surprise:

“Why, do you know each other? Do you know Mahlee, Father?”

Sir Philip Sackville recovered himself with a little start, while a glaze almost like a thin layer of ice seemed to form over the surface of his eyes. Yet it was with

difficulty that he achieved a tone of courteous indifference.

"Only as you have told me of her, my daughter. But I am nevertheless quite at her service." He turned to Mahlee with an effort to speak easily. "What is it you want, my girl?"

"Justice!"

The word fell from her like something heavy and threatening.

Sir Philip paled.

"Justice?" he repeated with studied vagueness, and daring to go no further paused on the word.

Her lip curled a little. "Yes—justice."

Blanche Sackville's face whitened with indignation. "What do you mean, Mahlee?" she cried. "No one is more just and no one more kind than my father." She put her hand in his as if to prove her unbounded confidence.

But the Eurasian seemed not to heed. For a moment she appeared to be gathering together her forces; then she said shortly: "I hope that may soon be proved after the story I have to tell him."

If Sir Philip inwardly winced it was not perceptible to his observers. "If it is the story of your own life, my poor girl," he said, suddenly deciding to take his bull by the horns, "you may be spared anything so painful, as I have already heard it from my daughter. The only question is, how can we help you?"

So perfectly had he by now caught the note of impersonal benevolence, of the cultivated man of the world disposed to be kind, that Mahlee was for a moment disconcerted. She stared at him in amazement, then broke into a strange laugh.

"Oh, you know it then—in all its details?" she could only say weakly.

Sir Philip nodded gravely.

"Until your disappearance from the mission, at least.

A very touching history." There was the same kindness in his tone, but the ice was still in his eye.

She saw it and shivered, but Blanche Sackville cried out in kindly enthusiasm :

"Yes, I told Papa everything, and you see, he wants to help you, and so do I. Do let us!" She came towards Mahlee extending her hands in her pretty shy gesture. "I worried dreadfully when I heard that you were lost, and I am so very glad that you thought of coming to us."

As there was no response, she continued a little nervously. "How clever of you to devise this way of getting back to your friends—with the white flag of truce; it's just like a romance. You must have had awful experiences, but you were quite right to come to us, to consider us your friends—wasn't she, Papa?"

"Quite right; I shall be pleased to do what I can." Something warned him not to pronounce the word *money* before this young woman, yet his tone clearly implied that that was the nature of the aid he stood ready to give.

Mahlee's heavy lids had by this time lowered over her eyes, but her narrowed gaze was still kept upon her father's face. She seemed to be absorbing its every line. The light from the open door fell upon the three—on the chill handsome face of Sir Philip with its features over-sharpened and a little drawn; on the white loveliness of the English girl, more lily-like than ever after the deprivations she had endured; and on the tawny beauty of the Eurasian with her brooding watchful eyes; and in spite of the difference between them, their subtle resemblance was at that moment almost startling. As Mahlee was still silent, Blanche Sackville spoke again.

"There, you see you have his own word for it, Mahlee; but do tell us all about yourself. Where have you been, and how did you happen to get lost? It was

horrible! The missionaries hunted everywhere. They'll all be so glad to see you; and now that a truce is declared, there won't be any more war—will there? And everything will be as before. Please do stay in the legation and let us help you."

The young girl's voice was so sincerely kind that it brought a ghostly hope into Mahlee's own; yet her tone was of one who confers a favour rather than of one who begs it, as coming to a sudden decision, she turned to Sir Philip.

"You say that you know my story," she said to him clearly, succinctly. "You know who and what I am, and you offer to help me. I accept, if you are prepared to help me in the only way in which you know I can be helped."

The uncompromising look in Mahlee's eye had translated itself into her voice. The spirit in the girl moved Sir Philip's admiration; in truth it moved something more profound. Had there been only himself to consider, he might at that instant have given her the acknowledgment she craved—might even have taken her to his heart. But the sight of Blanche Sackville, that other piece of flesh and blood and spirit which was also his child and a thousand times dearer than this stranger, kept his voice hard. Yet it shook a very little as he replied in much the same words as before:

"I shall be glad to do anything for you within reason."

"Of course he will, Mahlee!" Blanche Sackville cried triumphantly. "Why do you need so many assurances? My father always means what he says. And as for Mahlee being reasonable, Papa, naturally she won't wish anything out of reason."

For a moment, the Eurasian was silent, then slowly and deliberately, as one coming out of a profound reverie, she said:

"What I want is very reasonable." She looked straight at Sir Philip. He felt the blow coming and half turned away his head.

"I have a father," she continued, straightening herself proudly for her supreme statement, "who is a foreign mandarian—an English nobleman. I want my father to acknowledge me as his daughter before the world, and otherwise legitimise my position in it so that it may no longer be the ambiguous, untenable thing it has been. If he will do this, I shall then feel myself as, in truth, belonging to the white race, and will give up my connection with the Boxer Society to which I now belong."

As the girl ceased speaking, the air seemed to become surcharged with something heavy and explosive. Sir Philip's high narrow forehead was drawn into a frown, and in his eyes was to be seen that blue glint which once, long ago, had proved so terrible to old Madame Ling in the coffin shop. But her granddaughter faced it now without quailing while she waited for her answer. It did not come at once, for Blanche Sackville, glancing rapidly at her father's face, and seeing its look of deep displeasure, spoke first:

"Why, Mahlee!" she said gently, "I'm afraid you *are* unreasonable. How can Papa help you when you don't even know the name of your father? But it's awful for you to belong to the Boxer Society, and you *must* give it up."

The young girl's tone showed that she was inexpressibly shocked by Mahlee's connection with the enemy. A look almost of pity such as a sophisticated elder sister might show for the innocence of a younger came for a moment into the Eurasian's face. She did not answer Blanche, but turned again to Sir Philip as if she had not heard her.

"Will you do this thing for me?" She put the question in the same clear deliberate voice. Her eyes

were on a level with his, and once more he saw their pleading—that terrible pleading for life. She had even—almost as if against her will—come towards him a little, close enough for him to feel her warm breath on his face. He saw her rich strange beauty, the tenderness of her youth; he knew that he had but to hold out his hand and call her “Daughter” to see her cast herself at his feet in an ecstasy of love and gratitude. The angry glint in his eyes died; his voice even quavered with something like regret.

“My poor girl, I cannot.”

It might have been a sentence of doom for the hush it brought to the three. Blanche Sackville turned a terrified questioning look upon her father’s face, and then, struck by some indescribable expression upon it, suddenly went pale to the lips; at the same instant a shadow of something old and careworn fell over the young girl’s fresh beauty. For a moment she paused, wavering between the two; then with an almost furtive movement, she went over and stood by her father’s side. As for Mahlee, she had not moved; nor for several instants did her expression alter. She seemed to be trying to comprehend the full import of those words which Sir Philip had just uttered—to grasp their significance for her future. But presently that redoubtable change which in two previous crises of the Eurasian’s life had come upon it began to work in it now. There was the same slow lifting of the heavy lids until not only the blue irides but also the whites of the eyes were baldly uncovered; and this was followed by the same wild backward tossing of the head until the loosened black braids undulated like snakes. For an instant her lips parted as if for speech. A torrent of reproach seemed to be on the point of bursting from them. They opened and closed several times thus, but no sound came. The spectacle of this suppressed fury was infinitely more terrible—more sinister—than any

outburst, however wild, could have been. Sir Philip Sackville and his daughter averted their faces.

But at last the silence was strangely broken by a voice exceedingly suave and courteous bidding them "Good day!" and in another moment the Eurasian had passed through the door and was rapidly crossing the court towards the great gate of the legation which had been left unbarred for the passage of the messenger of truce. On the street, a rider on a black mule galloped to meet her; as soon as he was abreast, Sam Wang flung himself off the animal and stretched out his hand to her.

"Come!" was all he said. For a single instant she hesitated with that old involuntary shrinking from him. Then something cruel and malign flamed in her eyes and she broke into a sick mad laugh.

"My sweet lover! my husband!" she cried, extending her hand to meet his. "Of course I will go with you. With whom else should I go? And when we have killed every foreign devil in China we shall celebrate our nuptials."

He looked at her with a savage grin of joy.

"Aye! aye!" he responded in his deep guttural bass. "So be it!"

He lifted her into the saddle of the big mule, and leaping on behind her spurred the beast into a gallop.

XXVI

It was the night of the thirteenth of August. The brief armistice of a month ago had been utterly forgotten in the days of fierce and constant assault which had followed. And now everybody understood that the end was at hand. For the great Army of the Allies, after having suffered innumerable repulses and delays, was known by the Chinese to be very near Peking. So it was with the energy of despair that they were fighting in a last supreme maddened effort to destroy the Foreign Devils.

At present it was within an hour of midnight, and the firing had attained its maximum pitch. The sky, of a dead blackness, seemed like a pall about to drop. All the light visible came from the earth in a vast, lurid, and irregular circle around the legations resembling the ring of some gigantic Necromancer. It might have been divined that he was at foul work from the venomous rapidity with which, from every point of the jagged circumference, jets of flame darted upward. These were met by opposing tongues of fire from an inner circle within the ring and together became a blaze so dazzling and vicious that the eye was blinded in its presence.

Every gun of known and unknown pattern, even to old cannon dug up for this occasion from the bowels of the ancient city, vomited forth death and fury. Countless myriads of projectiles flew through the air like fiery hailstones to crash a moment later against the barricades with a terrific force. The noise was appalling.

For an hour this continued without abatement, but

as midnight sounded the exhaustion of the Chinese became manifest. Trumpets of cease-fire suddenly blared out along the lines, and soldiers dropped their red-hot muskets to the ground. In the halt, it was seen that whole divisions of men had melted into oblivion. The air was filled with the smell of steaming blood, and in the diminished light, flat yellow faces showed against the black fortifications contracted by fatigue and fear.

Ten or fifteen minutes passed thus. A heavy discouragement took possession of the soldiery. For two months they had done their uttermost to lay low the foreign walls, but those walls still stood. Where there not, in very truth, devils behind them against whom it was useless to contend? And every moment was bringing a great army of new devils nearer the city. An ominous muttering went through the ranks. What had become of the Illustrious Patriot's promises of divine aid? Had his boasted powers failed him at the crucial hour? A fellow with the embroidered mauve coat and blue trousers of a Kansu artillery man, lounging in a group against one of the barricades, spat contemptuously upon the ground.

"Bah! a sham patriot! worse than Cobbler Li, the sham eunuch. They say he's no more than the son of a foreign devil and a common harlot. Doubtless from the beginning he's been playing us false. The only patriots we can trust to now are our heels."

He stretched out his bayonet and speared the head of a corpse dissevered from its body—a ghastly thing with dead bulging eyes and queue matted in its own gore.

"This!" he said, holding it up before his companions, "is what we'll all look like if we stay here another hour."

A sickly hue of fear spread over the yellow faces. "True! true! the fellow speaks the truth!" they cried. "Why not flee before it is too late?"

A clandestine movement of retreat began. Soldier by twos and threes whispered to each other, and simultaneously slunk away into the darkness.

But suddenly the Patriot himself, astride his big mule with red trappings came racing along the lines. His hair, loosened under the scarlet head-cloth of the Boxer chief, streamed out behind him like a coarse black mane. Above his waist, girt with the sash of the I Ho Ch'uan, his powerful chest rose and fell in strong exultant rhythm. And as he rode, he twirled with dazzling swiftness above his head, a great naked sword. His eyes blazed like hot coals.

"Up with your arms! Up with your arms!" he cried, "For the Goddess of the Red Lantern Light is here to give us victory!"

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth before a band of red-robed girls was seen advancing wildly, with bodies swaying from right to left to the accompaniment of a savage chant in minor key; they gesticulated, they screamed, they brandished swords and spears and flaming torches; some even lost their footing and rolled over each other in fanatical hysteria on the bloody battle ground. And in their midst, their Divinity no longer wore her image-like calm, but had become the living figure of War. She stood erect in her red palanquin, clothed in a superb scarlet tunic overwrought in gold with the battle of the Chimæras. In her magnificent head-dress, worn above the black braided masses of her hair, blazed two great jewels—the Flaming Pearl of the Dynasty and the Ruby of the Red Lantern Light Society. Her skin in the flare of the torches gleamed like ruddy gold. In the right hand she held a great sword, in the left she upbore an enormous red lantern like a sun which sets before a tempest. For a moment she was silhouetted in high relief against the grim old Tartar Wall.

"Up! brave patriots!" she cried in a loud ringing

voice. "Fight and be not dismayed, For the walls of the enemy shall not endure. To-night is victory!"

In another instant she was past, whirling madly with her maidens around the vast, jagged circle, and shouting words of courage to all on her way. It was the Dance of the Witches in the Necromancer's Ring!

A blood-curdling cheer followed them. "The Goddess! The Goddess of the Red Lantern Light! Victory is ours!"

The look of fear and fatigue vanished as if by magic from the flat yellow faces, giving place to one of gleeful and barbarous malice. The deserters rushed back to their posts, catching up their still smoking guns, or frantically snatching others from the corpses in their path; while new swarms of men seemed to rise in black bunches from the ground. With horrid yells the attack on the legations was renewed; the fury of the assault was now indescribable; for two hours Hell was unloosed, while the mad witches, led on by their mad magician, danced in the Ring.

Then suddenly above the frightful clamour, far in the distance, but distinctly audible, broke forth a heavy, reverberating boom. It had the effect of a great, imperious voice laying down its commands from the eastern obscurity. Less loud than penetrating, it at once paralysed the demoniacal activity of the Chinese. There was a lull in the pandemonium.

Boom! boom! it spoke again somewhere out of the eastward, and the sound, though still muffled by distance, was immense, like the rolling in of a thousand breakers.

There could be no more question! It was the great Army of the Allies rapidly approaching Peking. In a little while they would be within the gates!

The paralysis which had seized the Chinese turned into a panic.

"*Yang ping lai liao!*" (the foreign soldiers have

come!) they cried, and, dropping their weapons, ran this time in good earnest.

In a moment the retreat had become a stampede. Caught in an inextricable tangle of men and beasts the Goddess of the Red Lantern Light and her maidens were seen in the flare of their torches struggling for a passage. The girls screamed with shrill fear, and the face of their Divinity, still upborne upon her palanquin, wore a ghastly pallor.

The Patriot on the big mule was separated from her by the crowd.

"Back! back! you cowards!" he called savagely to the retreating men, "Back! I say, to your places!"

For an appreciable instant his furious command had its effect. As if mesmerised by his eyes, which glowed like walls of fire in the obscurity, the mob swayed backward with a strange murmur; a few soldiers even picked up their guns; but the next moment, a prolonged roll of distant artillery threw them into a yet greater panic.

"*Yang ping lai liao!*" again the cry went up, and now the forward surge was so strong that it almost took the big mule off its feet. Keeping his seat by a supreme effort, its rider looked about him over the heads of the multitude, and as he looked his teeth gnashed together with a harsh grating sound, and a spasm of rage and despair shook his huge body. No voice now could stem that tide of terror! The great game was over and he had lost!

"Run! Dogs of Chinamen! Run!" he mocked aloud, and broke into a long hideous peal of laughter.

Then suddenly he caught sight of the Boxer Divinity still struggling with her girls a few yards from him, and his eyes flamed with a new energy.

"Mahlee!" he cried aloud to her across the seething heads. "Courage! I am coming!"

He began to clear his way by brutal blows of his

musket on the heads and shoulders of the fleeing soldiery.

"Out of my path, vile turtle's spawn! Clear me a way, rabbits!"

In a few minutes he was almost within arm's length of the palanquin and its pale occupant.

"Mahlee! Child! I am here!" he cried again with hoarse triumph, extending his arms.

But he had given one blow too many. A soldier, braver than the others, turned with an angry curse and smote the black mule over the eyes with his own gun. The enormous beast, crazed with pain, reared and plunged, and then began to kick viciously, wounding many with his heels. It was the signal for a rain of blows on beast and rider.

"False Prophet!"

"Sham Patriot!"

"Call to the Goddess for help!"

"This time it is for you to get out of our way, bastard of a foreign devil."

For awhile the man in the saddle answered curse for curse, blow for blow, and by a miracle of strength and dexterity kept his seat on the plunging animal. In the light of the torches, still carried by the girls around the palanquin, his big head, bound in its red cloth, showed livid with rage above his assailants. Then some one shouted: "Shoot him down!" and instantly a dozen muskets were aimed at him and discharged.

A loud raucous cry broke from him; for a second or two he still rocked giddily in his saddle, his eyes starting from his face, a thick foam of agony gathering on his lips. Raising himself in the stirrups, he hurled his great naked sword in the face of his enemies. Then with a last superhuman effort, he again stretched out his arms to the girl; he opened his mouth to call her, but in place of her name a great tide of blood gushed from his lips, mingling with the foam; he fell, lunging

heavily forward towards the palanquin. The wounded and maddened mule dragged him for several yards through the mob; then the beast also dropped dead, and the feet of the fleeing multitude passed over them.

In the midst of her cowering maidens, the Goddess of the Red Lantern Light, sat open-lidded, unconscious, a staring image of stone.

Two men, who had watched the episode from a short distance, turned to each other with a grim smile.

"That's the end of one of the Triplets, Chung," the taller of the two said. "Do you remember what old Huang-ma used to prophesy: 'A fish sports in the kettle, but his life will not be long'? . . . But let's get Mahlee back to the palace and the girls to their homes on East Bell Street. See! See! she's fainted! She's falling!"

XXVII

It was nine o'clock on the ensuing night, and a page in the history of the Manchu Dynasty was just being ingloriously terminated. For as the last stroke of the hour sounded from the palace time-pieces, the great northern gates of the Forbidden City, moved, as it might almost seem, by some secret and long premeditated treachery against those pampered individuals whom they had so long shielded from the perils and hunger of ordinary mortals, closed sullenly upon the Sacred Persons.

The Imperial gates closed, and the Throne of China was empty! The Old Buddha and the Son of Heaven had ignominiously fled in the dress of common Chinese. And over their great capital, the Western Barbarians had settled like a swarm of locusts driven in by some adverse wind. In a few hours the Violet City itself, mystic impenetrable abode of the Emperors, would be turned into a den of thieves. But for this brief interval after the mad disorder of the flight, while as yet the enemy rested from the fatigues of its long forced march and turbulent entrance into Peking, an unnatural quiet prevailed throughout the vast area of the palace.

Mahlee stood supremely still within the great closed gateway until the rumbling of the last cart in that piteous ignoble cortège of the fleeing Rulers was drowned in the silence. Then she turned with an enigmatic smile.

"The key!" she said peremptorily.

The tall eunuch Wu motioned to a man dressed in the sky-blue tunic of the palace guards, who advanced with an enormous key.

She placed it in the lock of the great iron-clamped gate and turned it with a sharp contemptuous twist of her slender hand. The movement seemed in truth like a gesture of disdain towards those pitiful vanishing potentates. Then with a curious hauteur more whimsical than real, as if she were laughing at the recognition in herself of some old childish pose, she deliberately stepped into the Imperial yellow sedan, just abandoned by the Great Ancestress, and gave the order to return. The accent of the command was an exact reproduction of the Empress' own !

There was a moment of astonished hesitation among the chair-bearers, aghast at the sacrilege, while the other eunuchs near by who had been left in the haste of the court's flight, began to crowd about the chair and utter violent protestations. But the big Wu, with an inscrutable expression coming into his eyes, suddenly waved his hand :

"Make way for Our Goddess of the Red Lantern Light," he cried ; and, as if hypnotised, the chair-bearers raised the sedan and all the eunuchs fell into line.

"Our Goddess of the Red Lantern Light !" they echoed, waving aloft their lighted torches.

With a strange little laugh of mingled self-mockery and triumph, Mahlee fell back on the yellow satin cushions and abandoned herself to the illusion of the hour.

"A *tai-tai*, a very great *tai-tai* !" she murmured.

And as she reclined there and was borne swiftly along in the night, the stillness of the great deserted place laid hold on her. How old the world was here ! She seemed to remember herself as some princess of ancient Thebes or Babylon, returning from a long journey to the palace of her fathers. These colossal silent avenues, these vast marble courts, this labyrinth of walls, thick as those of a dungeon and blood-red in the torches' flare ; the

oppressive tunnel-like depth and hugeness of the triple gates through which she passed, surmounted by their incomprehensible towers and guarded by their monstrous heraldic beasts which seemed to squint at her with evil eyes; and weighing down upon all, the terrible yellow monotony of the palace roofs—these things appeared in the midsummer-night's gloom but as the phantasmagoria of a dream.

She was still possessed by this swooning sense of utter unreality—of moving in a time and place immeasurably remote from the present—when the sedan stopped at last before the old Dowager's palace, but lately the scene of such wild confusion. As she alighted with the help of Wu, the other eunuchs, who at the outset had protested against her audacity, now stood silent and respectful. Indeed these sexless creatures, with their life-long training in obedience and suave ceremonies, were incapable of real resistance. Probably at heart they were indifferent. Why, in truth, should they care to uphold the honour of a runaway old Empress and an empty throne in this paltry moment left before the inevitable inrush of the barbarians? Many of their faces now began to reflect Wu's own ironical enjoyment of seeing an obscure girl, figurehead of a lost cause, usurp with such fine impudence the immemorially sacred prerogatives of the Great Ancestress to whose vain pomps they had been so cruelly sacrificed in youth. At a sign from Wu, they now raised their torches in final salute.

"Our Goddess of the Red Lantern Light!" they cried, as Mahlee passed up to the Throne Room. She turned at the threshold and smiled at them her enigmatic smile. It was her acknowledgment of the last public homage ever paid to the great Divinity of the Boxers!

Then the immense folding doors opened to let her pass. She entered alone. The great hall was quite dark, and even in the August night emanated a faint

chill as from an empty sarcophagus. She stopped in the middle of the floor and turned towards the invisible throne.

"The Old Buddha!" she exclaimed, and the darkness rang with the fiercely mocking cynicism of her laugh.

XXVIII

A FAINT radiance behind the padded satin portières which fell from the lintel of the great dragon-emblazoned door, leading from the hall to her Majesty's day-rooms, told Mahlee that she was expected by some one. It was her pretty Manchu handmaiden, Tsi Chu, who by some instinct had divined that her mistress would come back that night to the Imperial chambers rather than go to her own palace. She had lighted the big lantern which hung from the ceiling in the sitting-room, and put everything in immaculate order, so that not a sign was left to betray the shameful panic which had so lately taken place there.

The girl was lighting some slender tapers of sweet incense before the small shrine to Buddha, as Mahlee parted the curtains. At the slight sound, she turned and gazed at her mistress. Then, as if awestruck by the remote look of Mahlee's face, she dropped to her knees.

"O Glorious Goddess!" she murmured.

But Mahlee put a hand on the maid's shoulder.

"Little Purple Bamboo," she said in English, as if speaking to herself, "it is but a poor weak Goddess we are to-night." Her voice expressed infinite *ennui*.

Then, in Chinese, she gently bade the girl rise and tell her what had occurred during her absence.

Tsi Chu, emboldened by her mistress' kindness, began to talk eagerly. She told her that there were many concubines and slave-girls left in the palace who were in despair at the thought of the fate which awaited them on the morrow; they were now huddled together in one of the pavilions, and begged the clement Goddess to come and give them counsel.

Mahlee knit her brows at this news. Alas! What could she do for these helpless ones abandoned by their Imperial protectors? Poor forbidden fruit kept for the delight of a Son of Heaven, now in danger of being ruthlessly ground into the mud by hordes of barbarous soldiers! She thought rapidly. To whom could she commit them?—to what power, to whose mercy? Suddenly a curious look flashed over her face. Andrew Handel! She laughed to herself as she remembered that last picture of him, walking so gravely at the head of the troop of school-girls—poor silly sheep rescued by this noble young shepherd from the slaughter-house! Had she been one of those girls, how gladly would he have saved her, too—with what fine impersonal heroism snatched her from destruction!

She laughed again bitterly. Yes, it was clear that Andrew Handel was the one to call upon now. Succourer of innocents! What more befitting work, indeed, for an immaculate young Knight of the Cross!

"Tsi Chu," she said, "lead me to the pavilion where the women are."

The maid preceded her through several courts, now deserted by even the eunuchs, up a flight of marble steps, and across a wide terrace adorned with impossible dwarf trees and gigantic bronze urns. At the end of the terrace was a lighted glass gallery leading into a pleasure pavilion where Mahlee saw groups of Manchu girls in brilliantly coloured silks, with cheeks and lips dyed carmine, and fantastic flower-bedecked coiffures. Some were talking and gesticulating hysterically; others, frightened to silence; but at the sound of footsteps, one and all uttered shrill screams of terror and fled into a court beyond. Mahlee smiled at the scuffle of their little feet—the vision of their gaudy vanishing tunics. Their alarms seemed to her scarcely more real than the panic of a set of figures detached from some antique fan or bit of old porcelain. They came peeping and peering

back presently, and when they saw that it was the "Goddess" were soon kneeling about her with little imploring cries and gestures.

She gave them what comfort she could. That very night, she promised, a message would go from her on their behalf, to a powerful young god who would come in the disguise of a foreigner and rescue them if they were ever in any real danger.

"You will know your deliverer," she said with an odd intonation, "by his eyes, which are the colour of pale opals, and his hair, which is like gold mingled with ashes, and his voice, which is as the sound of water flowing from a mountain glacier. Whatever he bids you do, obey him without question, for he is a being of marvellous goodness and wisdom." Here Mahlee paused to strangle a hard little laugh, and then continued. "If he commands you to go forth with him out of the palace, go without fear, for he will lead you to a place of safety; but if he tells you to abide where you are, be at peace, likewise, since this will mean that the Great Chiefs of the foreigners will give you ample protection."

As she ended, the poor creatures thanked her with obsequious formulas of gratitude accompanied by kowtowings of their flower-bedecked heads. They seemed, indeed, perfectly reassured, even happily excited.

"Opal eyes, hair like gold mingled with ashes, a voice as the sound of water from a mountain glacier," they repeated to each other with bright little nods of wonder. Surely the advent of a god, even in the disguise of one of the dreaded foreigners, would be a welcome variation in the monotony of their lives.

As Mahlee withdrew with her handmaid, she smiled at them graciously, though with some weariness. Pretty pets of a Chinese Emperor! How alien they seemed to her at that moment; how sharply did they make her feel her own infinite isolation. She glanced back as she

recrossed the terrace. They were now chattering together joyously. In the frail kiosk, they looked like birds of gay plumage imprisoned in some fantastic cage.

On re-entering the Empress' chambers, Tsi Chu, without a word from Mahlee, hastened to prepare the writing materials for the letter. Since it was to be addressed to a god, the young girl felt that great care must be taken in the selection of the "*Wan fang sz pao*" or "four precious things of the library," namely, the pen, ink, paper and inkstone. After numerous comparisons and discardings, she finally took from a sandal-wood box lined with yellow silk a narrow slip of tinted rice-paper of exquisite transparent tissue stamped with various emblems in water lines. She spread this out upon a table, laying beside it a number of fine brushes and a carved soapstone upon which the old Dowager rubbed her India ink. The stick that Tsi Chu chose was violet-coloured and perfumed. She moistened it and rubbed it upon the stone until the ink was of proper consistency; then with a gesture towards the table, and a low bow to her mistress, the maid withdrew to an inner room.

Left alone, Mahlee sat down before the table. She took up one of the brushes, dipped it in the ink and tried it mechanically on a bit of the polished surface of the soap-stone. It wrote well, but she discarded it for another, and that for a third. Finally, with a curious absent-minded deliberateness, she drew the paper towards her, examined with minute attention each one of the emblems traced in water lines, then dipping her brush once more in the ink, began to cover the page with her beautiful Chinese ideographs. She wrote slowly, almost painfully, forming each character with great care as if to satisfy a master of penmanship. The thought came to her that the Ya-bah would have been pleased to see how neatly she made each stroke.

"Most illustrious and estimable Light of Wisdom," she wrote. "The egg fights with the rock, even as we

have fought with you. Hopeless resistance doomed to early defeat! Yet are great conquerors ever magnanimous and the 'feeling of pity' as Mencius tells us, 'is common to all men.' Nevertheless, she who writes these words does not beg pity for herself, knowing now how soon she will be beyond so trivial a need. Only in behalf of those helpless ones, the Manchu virgins left in this palace, many of whom are mere children, and all of whom are blameless, does she beseech your merciful care; so that even as you were a saviour unto the maidens of the mission school, you will now deliver these also from dishonour, either by leading them forth yourself, if need be, to a place of safety, or by commending them with earnestness to the protection of the great Allies."

She read this over three times, smiled, albeit a little wanly, at her classic quotation, and the elegance of her chirography, then took from a wallet at her belt a small monolith of chalcedony carved at the base in high relief with the single character for *Goddess*. It was her official seal. She dipped it in the scented violet-coloured ink and pressed it firmly upon the paper in the place for her signature. The impression was perfect. But as she removed the stone, her hand became strangely limp, and the seal released from her grasp fell to the floor and cracked obliquely across the sacred character.

Was it an omen? In spite of herself, Mahlee uttered a sharp cry of fear. The chill from the dark Throne Room beyond reached her through the satin portières like a menace. She remembered with a shudder, those huge terrible walls through which she had passed, and which now shut her in almost hermetically. Rampart within rampart, blood-red, blind, inexorable, they seemed like the double, the quadruple—the infinitely multiplied—sides of some vast stone coffin. She felt smothered—suffocated. Half rising, she began to push out with her hands on either side, as if to keep off some formidable weight which threatened to crush her. But the

next instant she realised the absurdity of her gesture and sank feebly back into her chair. The fierce pride which had so long sustained her left her completely. She felt little and weak—childishly terrified. Her throat contracted in a desire to cry as she dropped both arms across the table and bent her head over them in a pitiful attitude of defeat.

“O, Andrew! Andrew!” she wailed.

Then suddenly she raised her head, seized a scrap of paper and a pen, and began to write in English with eager passionate haste.

“Come to me,” she wrote. “Come quickly, Andrew, my love. Take me from this tomb where I suffocate, where the walls are crushing out my breath. I love you! I want you! All the rest has been a terrible mistake—a hideous, unthinkable nightmare. Yet the worst has not happened; I have escaped Sam Wang—I have belonged to no one—and now he is dead. He is dead! And there will be no more savage warfare and bloodshed—only quietness and peace and joy together. And whatever pleases you I will learn to do; your gods shall be my gods. I will be a Christian again and follow all the maxims and works of piety. How easy, indeed, that will be since I love you so much! Oh, we shall be happy, happy! and you will forget the proud English girl whose heart is cold towards you, and know, at last, that it is I—I alone—who love you truly.”

She paused in her feverish haste, and her pen quavered over the paper in a last appeal.

“O Andrew, pity me! save me!”

Then with renewed haste, as if her life were in some instant jeopardy, she folded the paper and scratched an address on the back.

“Tsi Chu! Tsi Chu!” she called, rising from her chair.

The maid came out from the inner room and looked with alarm at her mistress’ altered face.

"Our Goddess of the Red Lantern Light!" she said, falling upon her knees to receive the command.

But at the absurd inflated title and the girl's posture of adoration, Mahlee shrunk back like one suddenly convicted of a crime. The weird scene before the Boxer chiefs on the night when she had taken her oath of allegiance to the Great Sword Society, and was first hailed by the name of Goddess, rose vividly to her mind. She had sworn then to die rather than to recant. Yet what else was this letter which she had just been writing but a recantation—but high treason—itself? Were her feelings destined to play her false to the end? A wave of shame swept her face. If she were, indeed, nothing but the heroine in a bad melodrama, she would at least be true in her poor part. She put a quick hand over the letter to hide it from Tsi Chu's eyes. But in another moment her features had assumed their old immobility and when she spoke it was in a cool steady voice.

"Tell Wu to come here," she said briefly.

While waiting for the eunuch, Mahlee deliberately took up the letter she had written in Chinese on behalf of the slave girls and concubines, and folding it into an envelope, carefully addressed it. When Wu appeared, she gave him explicit directions for its delivery, which must on no account, she said, be delayed beyond an early hour in the morning. The eunuch assured her that her command should be exactly performed, and dropping on his knee, received the missive in a yellow box as from the hand of the Empress.

Upon his exit, Mahlee returned to the table, twisted the scrap of paper upon which she had last been writing, into a spiral about her long forefinger, and going over to the small shrine, set fire to it at one of the lighted incense sticks. She held it until it fell in ash from her hand at the feet of the Buddha. And Tsi Chu, watching reverently, knew that some mysterious sacrifice had just been offered from one divinity to a greater.

XXIX

THEN Mahlee turned with a strange smile to Tsi Chu.

"Bring me a pestle and mortar," she said, seating herself.

The girl obeyed wonderingly.

"And now some sweet herbs and old wine."

Tsi Chu, with increased astonishment, brought wine in a beautiful jade cup, and with it, several bunches of rare aromatic leaves from a chest used for the old Dowager's medicines and pungents. Mahlee selected a few of the most fragrant and ground them to a fine powder which she poured into the wine.

"It is for our sunrise potion," she explained with the same strange smile, "It will not lack bouquet!"

"Our sunrise potion, Glorious Goddess?" echoed the girl in surprise.

"Yes," said her mistress, raising her head slowly from the mortar. "We hold high audience to-morrow at dawn and shall need a pleasant stimulant. Yet one ingredient is still lacking in the cup."

"One ingredient?" again echoed the maid with an accent of fear.

"The most essential of all," replied Mahlee, fixing Tsi Chu with her gaze.

The girl trembled without comprehending. She was fascinated, but a little frightened by the Goddess' azure eyes.

Mahlee continued in an even tone:

"Do you remember the eunuch Kuei who was guilty of disobedience, Tsi Chu?"

The maid trembled still more as she replied in the affirmative.

"And do you recall what the Empress put into his wine one day?"

The little Manchu paled. "Poison, Great Goddess," she whispered. "I know the vial in which she keeps it ready for all those who disobey. It is distilled from deadly herbs, and kills at once, yet without agony or contortion."

Mahlee looked at her steadily.

"Fetch me that vial, Tsi Chu."

The eyes of the two women met in a long gaze.

Then without a word, like a true Oriental, Tsi Chu brought the vial.

Her mistress took it from her hand and slowly poured its contents into the scented wine.

"Some would say, Tsi Chu, that we are preparing a bitter draught here," she said, in a tone of curious leisure, "but you can see for yourself that it is sweet." She held up the cup to the girl's face that she might catch the aroma.

The little handmaid shuddered, then suddenly fell on her face, kowtowing before Mahlee.

"Clement Goddess," she murmured, pleadingly, like a child begging for a treat. "Leave some sweet wine for me at the bottom of the cup."

Mahlee put her hand caressingly upon Tsi Chu's flower-like head. "I will remember," she said, softly. "Yet promise me to drink only if it be needful."

When she had wrung a reluctant promise from the girl, she arose and set the jade cup aside. It would not be needed until dawn!

The musical clocks in the Empress' sitting room were now striking midnight. Outside, under the eaves of the palace roof, two doves stirred in their sleep, and began to coo plaintively to one another. But when the melodious chiming had ceased, the doves again settled to repose.

"Tsi Chu," said Mahlee, as the last stroke sounded, "we will sleep now."

And that night, Mahlee, with none to say her nay, slept in the bed of the Empress Dowager of China. She flung herself upon it with the same little laugh of self-mocking triumph that she had given when she usurped the Imperial sedan at the gate of the Forbidden City. It was the great carved day-couch, built into an alcove and curtained off from the large sitting room by richly embroidered satin hangings. In this recess the elegant old woman was wont to take her afternoon siesta, lulled to repose by the cadenced voice of a eunuch reading from her favourite classics.

A subtle odour pervaded the place—exquisite, but a little sickly, as of frail perfumed things perishing and already touched by decay. So, Mahlee thought, might withered flowers smell on the bosoms of dead queens in ancient tombs. She turned half faint and parted the curtains of the alcove to let in the fresher air from the sitting room. Then she lay back among the silken cushions of the bed and drew over her a sumptuous yellow coverlet brocaded with golden dragons.

"A *tai-tai*, a very great *tai-tai*," she murmured for the second time that night as her eyelids closed.

But her dream took her back to a day in the old squalid coffin-yard. She was a little child of five or six; and one morning she ran out on the street, where a great bully of a boy began to throw stones at her, calling aloud: "*Hsiao yang kwei-tz*," or little foreign devil; and when she asked him why he called her by that ugly name, he told her mockingly to go look at her eyes and she would know why. So she ran into the house and asked her grandmother for a mirror that she might see her eyes. But her grandmother turned angrily upon her and said: "Girl, will you always be a cat treading on my heart?"

Then she was afraid: but she waited, and when Ma-

dame Ling's back was turned, climbed on to a chair and looked into a mirror on the wall. *And she saw that her eyes were blue like a demon's !*

Mahlee half awoke with a cry of childish terror. Then the torpor of the August night repossessed her, and her spirit sank into complete oblivion.

And now there was absolute silence in the palace. It was as if the stillness of a thousand years of seclusion had concentrated itself into these last hours before the rude breaking in of the barbarian. Even the Chinese soldiery lying within the extreme ramparts, slept in their places. Outside, in the court through which Mahlee had passed to the Throne Room, the waning moonlight revealed the bronze phoenixes and crouching lions ; and, stealing through the curtained windows of the Imperial apartments, touched to cold lustre the bouquets of jade and agate flowers set under their glass cases on the carved chests and tables. Curled upon a divan, the little Manchu handmaid slept profoundly. And on the great Imperial bed, with her dusky hair spread over the yellow satin cushions, and her form discreetly outlined beneath the sumptuous coverlet, Mahlee lay like the Sleeping Beauty of the Enchanted Palace.

XXX

THE hoarse continuous barking of cannon aroused Mahlee at dawn. She raised herself on her elbow and listened intently. The southern entrances to the palace were being bombarded. Then as she still listened, there was a heavy sound of crashing stones and timber. The first gates had fallen! Immediately in answer, came a long hissing fire from the Chinese riflemen who, since the day before, had been silently hidden within the palace enclosures.

But Mahlee knew that the last act had begun. Very deliberately, as if now, in truth, there was no doubt left as to what she must do, she arose from the Imperial bed, and began to don her ineffectual regalia of war. She clothed her long svelte body in the splendid crimson tunic embroidered in gold with the battle of the Chimeras, drew on her feet the high-soled Manchu shoes of red satin studded with gems, and circled her brow above her heavy black braids with the jewelled head-dress adorned with the Flaming Pearl and great Ruby. It would be high audience, indeed, that day!

Yet before she entered the Throne Room she had another duty to perform. Her soul as well as her body must be in worthy array to meet the Great Conqueror who was coming!

A hidden stairway led from the bed-alcove to a floor above, where, in a dim oratory, the Great Ancestress secluded herself daily for prayer and meditation. Mahlee now mounted the flight of steps, and found herself at once in this private sanctuary. The vague light of early morning, filtering through small panes of mother-of-

pearl set into the latticed windows, shed an opalescent glamour over the surface of things, leaving their bulk in gloom. It was like the sheen of phosphorus rather than daylight, a vague spectral radiance fitting to the place. It brought out in a lucid band the dado of saints and personified virtues in robes of gold and crimson painted about the wall, and set to pale gleaming the magnificent ornaments on the high altar; the tall candlesticks damascened with precious stones; the archaic vases upholding branches of jewelled flowers; and upon the great dreamy face of the golden Buddha above them, it rested like a mystery.

Mahlee sank upon the silken prayer rug of Imperial yellow in front of the altar. Slow spirals of perfumed incense, mounting from two great antique censers, enveloped her in an azure haze. She stretched her long arms out through the smoke and prostrated herself before the God.

A Mi T'o Fo . . . A Mi T'o Fo . . . (O Great Lord Buddha!) The girl's body swayed from right to left with a long rhythmic motion. The sun was rising, and the vague light in the oratory began to quiver with a thousand motes like fine gold dust blown softly upward on the ascending smoke-spirals. . . . A Mi T'o Fo . . . A Mi T'o Fo. . . . Were her eyes dazzled by the warm shimmer? or had her own reiterated movements made her a victim to hallucination?

For, from the Buddha, seated so still and impassive on the lotus-throne, another figure, more sublime, more daring and heroic, appeared to be emerging with arms outstretched in the form of a Cross. And suddenly, as the beautiful and lofty head broke through into the light, those outstretched arms reached towards her in a gesture of infinite tenderness, while the eyes above them fixed her own with an intensity she could scarce endure.

"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life."

The silence was eloquent with appeal. Life, life! and she was on the brink of oblivion!

"Christ!" she cried, springing to her feet and wildly holding out her arms to the vision. "O Christ, save me!"

But at the sound of her own voice she shuddered back. No, no! this, too, would be dishonour. Was *He* not the God of the West which had rejected her?—the God of her father who had given her life only to cast her off? Not the fear of oblivion itself could make her forget that!

With a low broken moan, she dropped her arms and let herself fall again on the prayer rug. . . . A Mi T'o Fo . . . A Mi T'o Fo. . . .

When she arose at last her features were as passionless as the Buddha's on the high altar. For there on her face before the great image of Passivity the long fierce duel of her life had ended. The East had claimed her child.

Slowly, almost stiffly, as if keeping step to some solemn processional music, Mahlee passed out of the oratory and down the stairs. But as she paused in the Imperial sitting-room to take the jade cup from its place, something broke the fixity of her gaze. It was the vision of the little Manchu handmaid still sleeping like a child. She went to the divan, and bending over it, touched with her lips the smooth cheek of the girl.

"Poor little Purple Bamboo!" she whispered and a film of tears clouded her sight.

Then, with the cup in her hand, she passed into the vast hall beyond. Its chill struck her mortally as the satin portières closed behind her back. She shivered, and with a last blind instinct of flight, put her arm out as if to part them again and escape, when a closer, sharper barking of the guns echoed and re-echoed through the hall. Instantly, Mahlee stiffened and set

her face towards the Throne. It was time, indeed, for her high audience !

Resuming her slow processional measure, she advanced up the floor of polished black marble in which the sombre splendour of the dull crimson walls and central dome, with its massive carved and painted pendants, was reflected like the rich hues of an autumnal forest in some deep pool. She gained the low carpeted dais, and mounting the steps, seated herself upon the great Dynastic Throne.

"A *tai-tai*, a very great *tai-tai*," she murmured, and raising the cup to her lips, received the Conqueror with an unscathed smile.

XXXI

ALTHOUGH the hour was still early, the news of the the tragedy enacted in the Throne Room had already spread through the palace when the eunuch Wu opened the immense folding doors for Andrew Handel to pass in.

The hardships of the siege had sharpened the young divine's face to lines of yet severer asceticism, and his body, in its limp and worn clothing, looked almost emaciated. As the doors closed behind him, and he advanced alone into the great hall, his step was slow, well-nigh halting. For although he had been told by the eunuch how he should find Mahlee, the actual sense of her presence there, even before he had perceived her, shocked him indefinitely. And in this mood and moment, the ascetic in him was sharply repelled by the magnificence of the place, its touch of barbaric grandiose.

The August sun, coming through the windows below the dome and reflected from the red walls and splendid coffered ceiling, sent flames of colour across the vast spaces of the interior without dispelling its obscurity or vault-like chill. And from afar he saw her, touched by the flames, a gleaming jewelled figure, throned in all the Pagan arrogance of its beauty, looking strangely tall and upright against the dull massiveness of the bronze screen behind the throne, yet listless, too, under the weight of its stiff archaic robes.

The black marble floor turned to ice under his feet as he approached, and its chill had left his face bloodless when at last he stood before the throne. He tried to avert his eyes, but he could not; and, gradually, as he

gazed, the colour began to surge back strongly to his face. Her sumptuous calm smote him like a vision from the mighty past.

"Semiramis, Queen of Nineveh!" he murmured, enthralled.

Then he saw her hand half stretched towards him from the sleeve of the gorgeous tunic, with the long fingers pale and limp, yet forming themselves, as it almost seemed, into some gesture of appeal. Perhaps he began to realise at that moment something of the love he had repudiated—a love for which he had sought in vain from her English sister—for his face grew grey again, touched by a vague remorse, and unconsciously he obeyed her mystic beckoning. And when he was closer, she drew him on still, until he needs must see the sombre rings about the eyes, the heavy shadowed lids, the poor lips, red yet and half parted, but grave now after that last smile of hers!

And suddenly he was smitten anew by her loveliness—not the superb thing of the moment before—but some strange touching purity of expression on the dead face, lifted and turned a little aside from him on its tender throat, with the black massed hair shading it mysteriously.

And that hand stretched towards him! He stooped and caught the poor limp thing to his breast.

"Mahlee!" he cried huskily, and bent to cover with a man's passionate kisses the exquisite fingers which lay in his. But stooping closer, he caught as upon that night under the locust tree, their pale golden gleam, and again that old subtle aversion, which he had never named to himself, revived within him. Slowly, almost reluctantly, as he had done once before, he let the hand fall before his lips had touched it.

Then for a long moment he gazed at her. And the blood receded again from his face, until it had assumed its old pallor. His eyes were gentle, infinitely pitying,

as he withdrew, but after that single moment of passion, he had become the priest once more.

And it was his priestly office that he fulfilled, when at the door of the Throne Room, he gave the order to the eunuchs to carry her from the palace that she might be given a Christian burial.

THE END.

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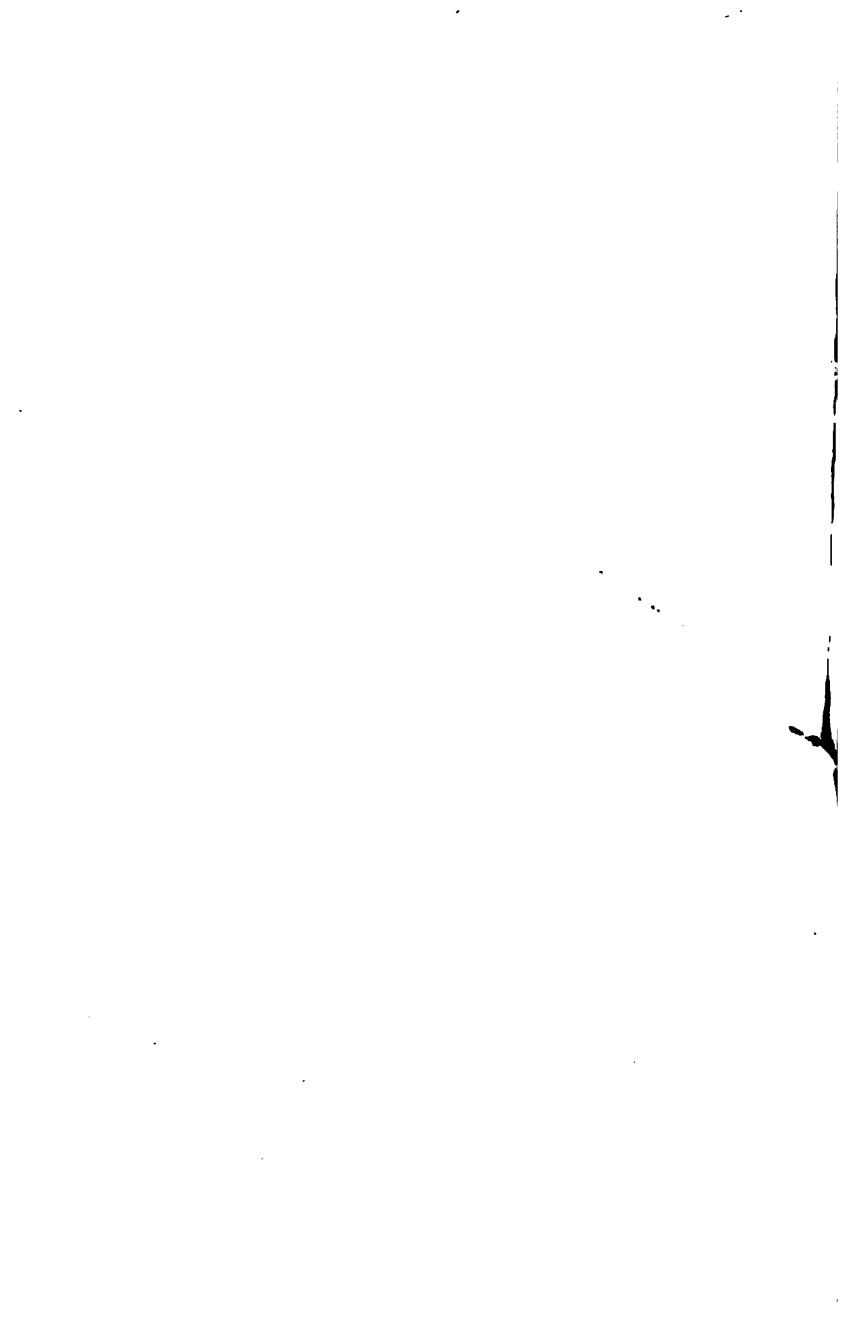
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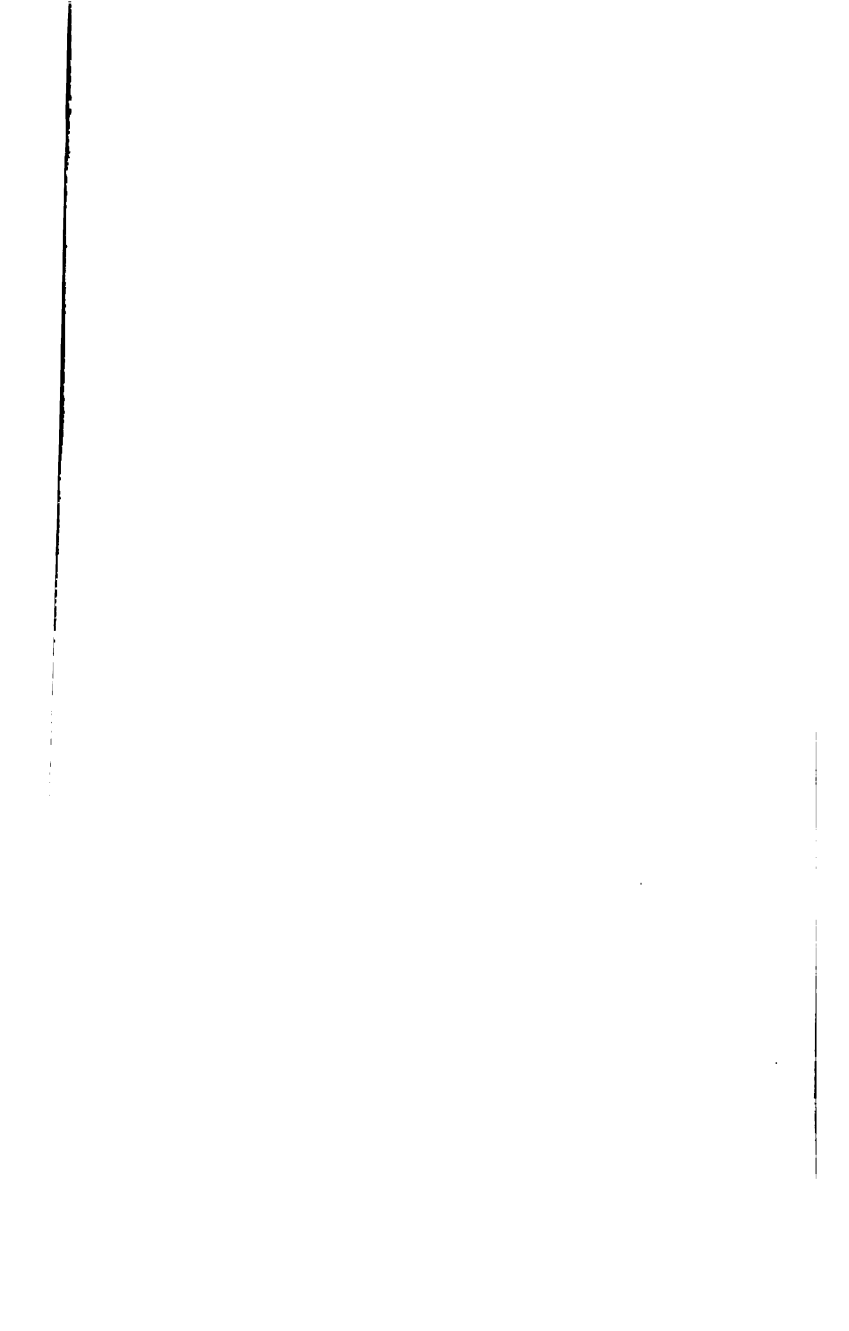
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